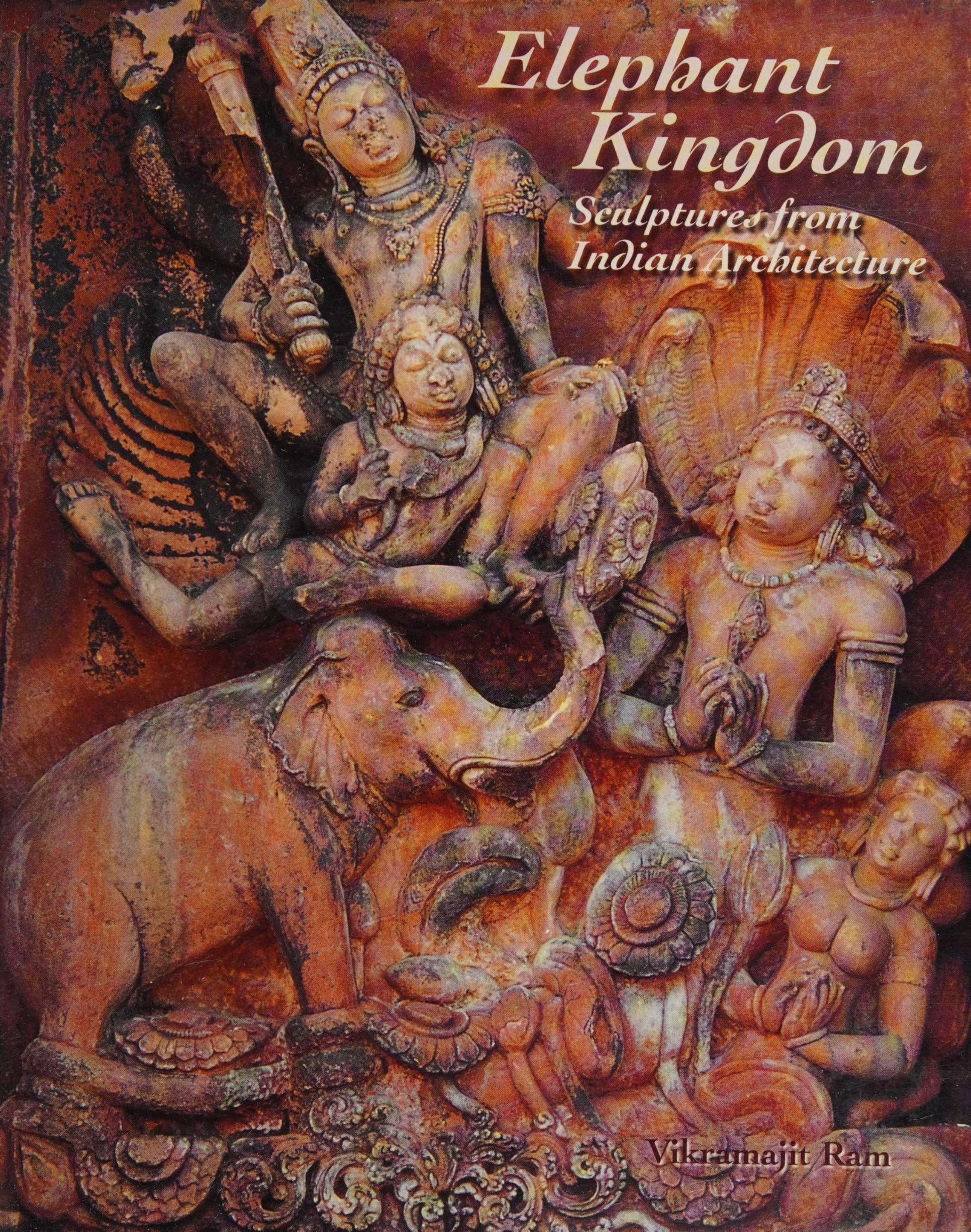
Elephant Kingdom

Sculptures from Indian Architecture



Vikramajit Ram

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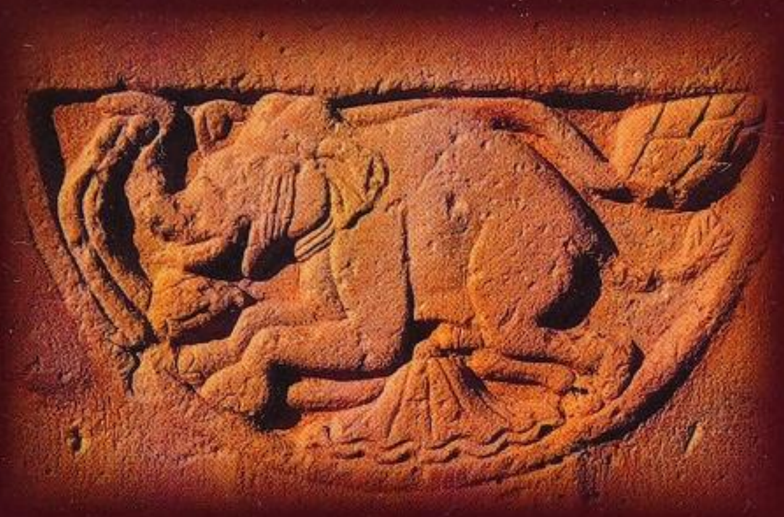
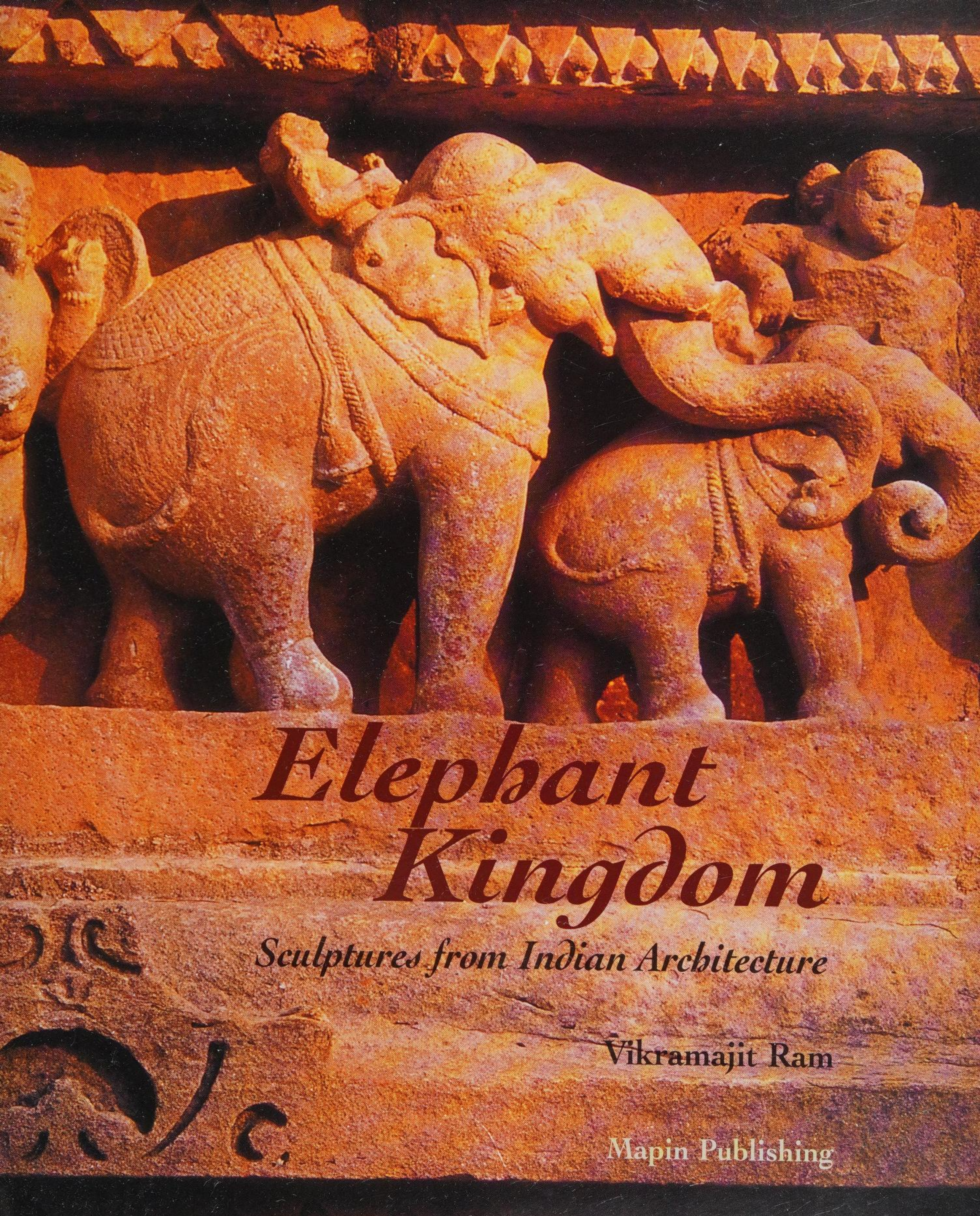


Elephants occupy a special place in the life and art of India. Since ancient times, they have been treasured and pampered as the ultimate beasts of burden, venerated as the vehicles of gods and kings and even worshipped in their own right. Their legendary attributes of strength, intelligence, nobility and longevity are eulogized in myth, epic and popular literature. In the figural and decorative arts, elephants provide an enduring fascination.

Elephant Kingdom traces the myriad stories and symbolisms behind India's much-loved animal, through its depictions in architectural sculpture. At the heart of the study is a collection of photographs from a diversity of antique settings—many of them in remote parts of the subcontinent. At centuries-old temples, monasteries, forts and palaces, elephants flank ceremonial entrances, enrich columns and capitals, form balustrades to stairways or stand as enigmatic sentinels of vast courtyards. Some are legendary characters in tales of dreams and salvation; others enact scenes from a faithfully observed natural history. Some transport kings and heroes into battle and the hunt; others are celestial messengers of rain, fertility and good fortune. From monumental freestanding sculptures to finely-worked narrative friezes, the warmth and energy of these depictions bear testimony to the achievements of countless anonymous artisans. The result of a series of journeys to places where elephants still endure in stone, this book is not only an album of inspirations and motifs unique to India, but also a record of the special status ascribed to these majestic—and now endangered—giants of the animal world.

With 77 colour illustrations

Elephant Kingdom



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Preface

Of all footprints, those of the elephant are greatest.

—Maha-hatthipadopama Sutra

In India, stories of elephants in life and legend have captured the imagination for countless generations. The Indian word for 'elephant', in a bewildering assortment of languages and dialects, had a way of entering our childhood vocabularies, often before we had set eyes on one. Its shape was amongst the first animals we described, with a twig in the dust or a crayon on paper. Some of our best-loved toys, of sun-dried clay or stuffed cotton, brought those puzzling dimensions into the grasp of our hands. Elephants visited our dreams. An encounter with the real thing invariably filled us with awe, delight and wonder.

Of the multitude of creatures indigenous to the subcontinent, the elephant stands ahead of the rest for the sheer range of its associations. The ultimate beast of burden still works alongside man in cities and forests. Its stature and gait have served its legendary role as a vehicle of the gods and of countless earthly kings. Its temperament is eulogised in myth, epic, folklore, music and popular literature. In art and ornamentation, few other animals enjoy a wider appeal.

The archetypal image of the Indian elephant—festooned in finery and bearing a turbaned rider on its back—lends to the species a mystique generally denied to its African cousin. Traditional artefacts in a variety of materials—from paint and precious metals to silk, stone, wood, and ironically, ivory—celebrate the processional theme in styles as diverse as their provenance. The image is also ubiquitous in Indian architectural sculpture. But here, alongside the archetype, appear scenes from other elephant realms that the scope of the artefact has rarely explored.

Figural art in sacred and royal Indian architecture yields a wealth of information on virtually every facet of the subcontinent's manmade, imaginary, and natural worlds. Since ancient times, temples and palaces have provided hospitable settings for various art forms to flourish. Stone sculpture, in particular, was to evolve as an integral component of architecture, lending itself to some of the most enduring impressions of different themes and inspirations—many of them echoed in reality at the very same settings. That sculptured stone elephants show up with unerring regularity in Buddhist, Jain and Hindu architecture is hardly surprising

given that these traditions, more than any other, have consistently acknowledged the animal for its mythical, ceremonial, symbolic and earthly associations. It is these associations and typical settings that, in turn, inform the title of this book.

The examples of works featured in the volume span over two thousand years of architectural sculpture: the earliest, dating from the 3rd century BCE; the most 'recent', from the late 18th century. All were documented in their original settings—chapels and monasteries, stupas, temples, palaces and cenotaphs—at sites within the boundaries of modern India. Against this broad canvas, the selection of images aims to demonstrate the many parallels and connections that exist between different interpretations, and also to highlight examples unique to a specific period or place. The images are organized around four thematic chapters that provide the historical and cultural frameworks to viewing them. The first chapter, 'Heaven and Magic', traces the stories and meanings behind the depiction of elephants in sacred art. The second, 'Life and Surrender', follows the animal to its natural world and witnesses its early encounters with capture and domestication. 'Pomp and Circumstance' pays homage to the royal elephant and the war elephant. Finally, 'Sentinel and Cipher' looks at symbolism in two distinct perspectives in architecture: the guardian elephant and the lion-elephant motif. Uniting them all is the power of the sculptures themselves, as their subjects loom over gateways, transport gods and heroes, or calmly traverse pleasant spheres.

Face of a deity, favourite souvenir, the Indian elephant today pays a heavy price for enchanting our lives for thousands of years. Its jungles are shrinking. A bloody and clandestine trade continues. Tired and dusty, many beg at temples or ferry tourists into forts. Tales of valour and companionship are largely forgotten. But perhaps behind their inscrutable smiles, the elephants remember.

The result of a series of journeys to places where India's elephants still survive in stone, this book is a tribute: to the anonymous artisan who rendered his subjects with warmth and affection; to those who have dedicated their lives to protecting a species; to others who still believe that elephants are magical; and to the elephants of our memories in whose footprints we have placed our own.

Heaven and Magic

Formerly, elephants could wander
wherever they pleased and assume any shape.
They roamed as they liked in the sky and on earth.

—Matangalila

Hewn out of the rock hills of Bhaja in the Deccan is a series of enigmatic cave-shelters dating from the 2nd to 1st centuries BCE. Ascribed to the Satavahana Period, these long-abandoned Buddhist *vihara*s (monasteries) and a *chaitya* (chapel) are amongst the earliest examples of rock-cut architecture in India: they replicate in stone a more antique tradition of structural timber construction and ornamentation. Alongside a rock-cut doorway in Cave 19, a weathered and windswept relief carving presents one of the earliest surviving depictions of an elephant in Indian art (Fig. 3).

The giant pachyderm makes its way through an assemblage of minuscule people and animals. That this is no ordinary elephant, but an otherworldly creature, is suggested by its scale in relation to the other figures. At one of its feet crouches a smaller, earthly counterpart, seemingly paying obeisance. Elsewhere in the composition are a regal personage graced by dancers and musicians, a stupa, a tree in full bloom, a horse-like creature, a crocodile, and a snarling lion.

The principal elephant carries two male riders. The grander figure sports an elaborate headdress, a garland, heavy earrings and a bracelet. In his right hand is an *ankush* (elephant-goad), decorated with flowers. Seated behind, a less magnificent attendant bears two staffs and a pennant. The garlanded character is none other than Indra—primeval god of thunder, lightning, rain and moisture. The elephant is his personal *vahana* (vehicle), the legendary Airavatha. The uprooted tree in the elephant's trunk evokes the fury of a passing storm. A tiny human is shown falling off near the roots; others rush for cover as the elephant advances. The scene, however, is not one of terror and destruction, but an allegory of rain and renewal.

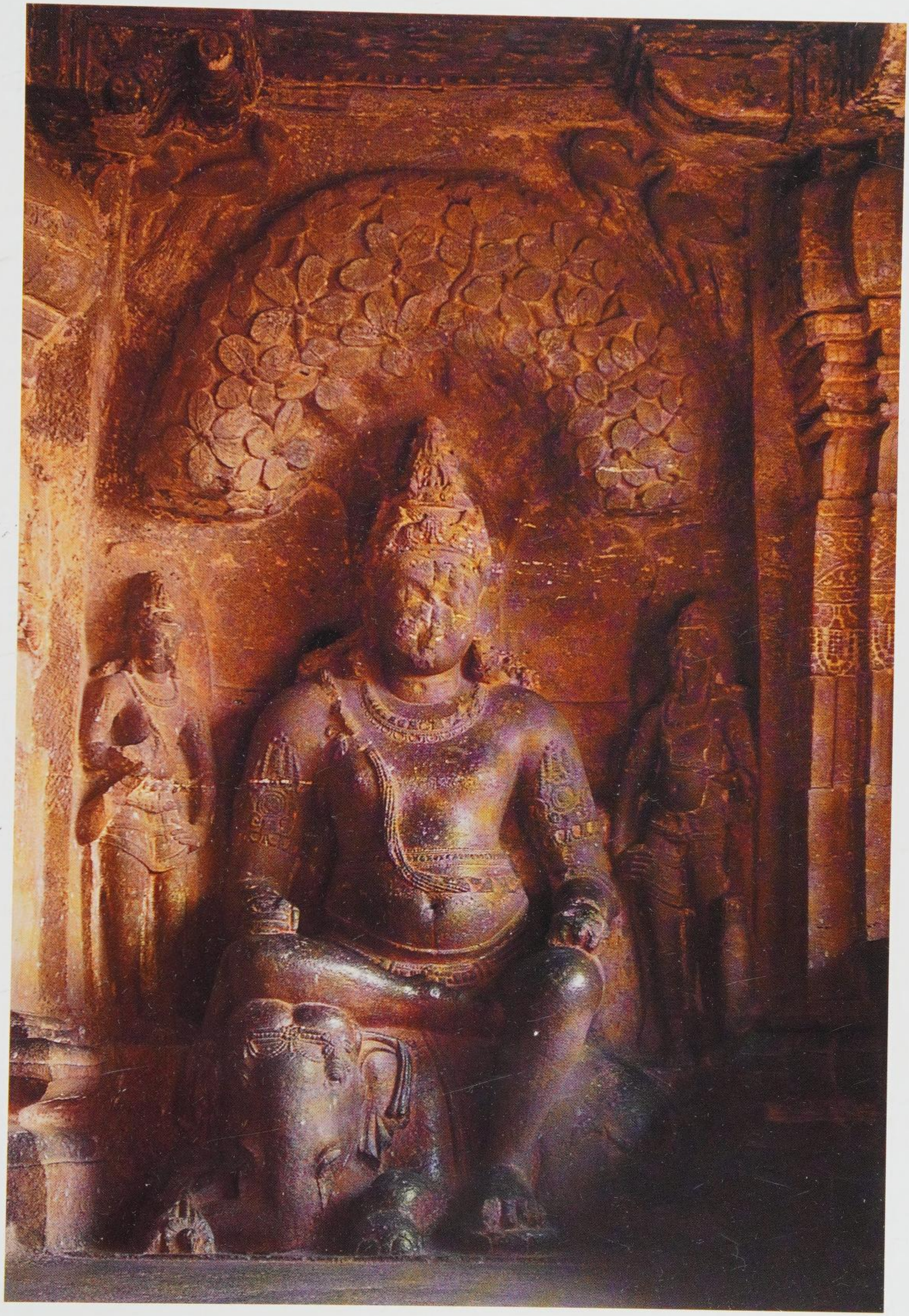
Since the earliest times, life and art in India have been inextricably linked with the cycle of seasons. In a civilization that is even today based largely on agriculture, rainfall is synonymous with fertility and good fortune. The symbolism of the cloud-elephant—enriching the earth as it sails through the sky with the god of weather on its back—is just one of the many ideologies shared by the Buddhist, Jain and Hindu traditions. Images of Indra and Airavatha feature in the sacred art of all three faiths.

Indra makes his debut in the Rig Veda, the earliest known religious text of the subcontinent and the foundation of all later Hindu scriptures. Thought to have been composed anywhere between 5000 BCE and 1200 BCE, the 1028 hymns contained in the work sing the praises of a vast pantheon of celestial, and predominantly male, divinities. The majority of the verses are dedicated to Indra: son of Dyayus, the Sky, and Pritivi, the Earth, and twin to Agni, the god of fire.

In his very first adventure, Indra vanquishes Vritasura, a demon of drought who has trapped the rain clouds, and saves the universe from annihilation. The exploit earns Indra the title of 'invincible weather-god'. Achievements in subsequent battles against evil elevate him to the status of king of gods and leader

Page 8:
3. Indra and Airavatha
Rock-cut wall panel, volcanic trapstone, Cave No 19, Bhaja, Deccan, Satavahana Period, 2nd century BCE.

Facing page:
4. Indra and Airavatha
Rock-cut wall panel, basalt, Indra Sabha Temple, Ellora, Deccan, Rashtrakuta Period, early 9th century.



in war, 'before whose pair of steeds carrying car in battle, enemies cannot stand.'[1] Indra's special attribute is an unfailing generosity towards all who laud him. The hymns also portray him as something of a connoisseur of the sacred intoxicant *soma*. As ruler of heaven and guardian of the east, his many weapons include a *vajra* (thunderbolt), a short lance known as the *paranja*, a quiver of arrows and a rainbow for the bow, an *ankush*, and Indrajala, the 'net of illusions'.

In post-Vedic literature, Indra's eminence begins to wane. His influence is gradually overshadowed by other Hindu deities such as Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshvara (Shiva). There are no temples dedicated exclusively to Indra. Depictions in sacred art generally restrict him to his original calling as weather-god.

That this once flamboyant figure should have an elephant as his *vahana* is no coincidence. The animal is large and magnificent. Generally composed, its spirit is capricious. Its fondness for water (and alcohol) is legendary. By a stretch of the imagination, a herd of lumbering elephants calls to mind a bank of thunderous rain clouds; like thunderstorms, elephants too are capable of untold destruction. If one of Indra's many epithets is Meghavan (cloud-rider), the name of his elephant means 'filled with moisture'. Airavatha, like his master, has other, more redolent names: Abhra-matanga (cloud-elephant); Arka-sodhara (sibling of the sun); Naga-malla (mighty elephant); and Sada-dana (ever in rut). In assigning the largest of land mammals to the king of gods, ancient India pays glowing tribute to the elephant's most feted attributes: strength, intelligence and longevity.

The original elephant of Hindu mythology, however, finds no mention in the Rig Veda where Indra's vehicle is always described as a golden chariot drawn by horses. Airavatha's own grand entry is reserved for a later creation myth[2] in which a collaboration of *deva*s (gods) and *asura*s (demons) churn a cosmic ocean of milk to obtain an elixir of immortality. Among the numerous sacred objects and personifications that surface from the churning is a milk-white elephant with four tusks. Each tusk symbolizes a divine quality: *prabhu* (sovereignty), *mantra* (counsel), *utsaha* (exuberance), and *daiva* (fortune). The elephant's colour and regal bearing prompt Indra to effect a change in his mode of transport.

In a variation of the ocean-myth, Airavatha is accountable (albeit indirectly) for the churning of the ocean. Here, the elephant already belongs to the king of gods. Indra is in his palace one day when a sage, Durvasas, calls on him with a garland of flowers. After Durvasas has left, Indra drapes the garland over Airavatha's tusks. The flowers attract a swarm of bees; Airavatha tears off the garland and flings it afar. When Durvasas hears that his gift has been discarded—without knowing the exact circumstances—he flies into a rage and curses not just Indra but the entire pantheon of gods with old age and decrepitude; he also prescribes an antidote: in order to regain their perennial youth and good looks, the gods must churn the ocean to procure the elixir of immortality. The curse begins to take effect and the *deva*s embark on their mission with the assistance of the *asura*s.

Airavatha, who has been consigned to the same ocean in disgrace (and for no fault of his), surfaces during the churning and is reunited with his master. Having spent aeons in the milk, he emerges white and cleansed of 'sins'.

A large-scale depiction of the god and his elephant is preserved at the eponymous Indra Sabha Temple in Ellora (Fig. 4). Although named for the king of gods, the rock-cut complex is, in fact, a Jain temple dedicated to Mahavira. Within its cavernous interiors, a subsidiary sculptural panel shows Indra as a fleshy warlord, holding forth in the arching shade of a *kalpavriksha*, the fabulous, wish-fulfilling tree-of-abundance that also surfaces from the churning ocean. Two attendants bearing *chamaras* (yak-tail flywhisks) flank the god. Peacocks roost in the tree above. Crouching at the ground level, Airavatha serves as Indra's throne, stoically bearing the magnificence of his master, whose 'belly, drinking deepest draughts of *soma* like an ocean swells'.[3] Nothing in the depiction even remotely recalls the lightness of the older, Bhaja rendering; instead, the modelling here seems to radiate a quietly restrained mammoth strength. Outside, in the courtyard, a monolithic sculpture of Airavatha watches over the entrance of the complex,

5. Vishnu Ananthashayana
Wall panel, red sandstone, Dashavatara Temple, Deogarh, Central India, Gupta Period, 6th century.

heralding the presence of his master inside. The elephant's head-ornament is identical in both sculptures.

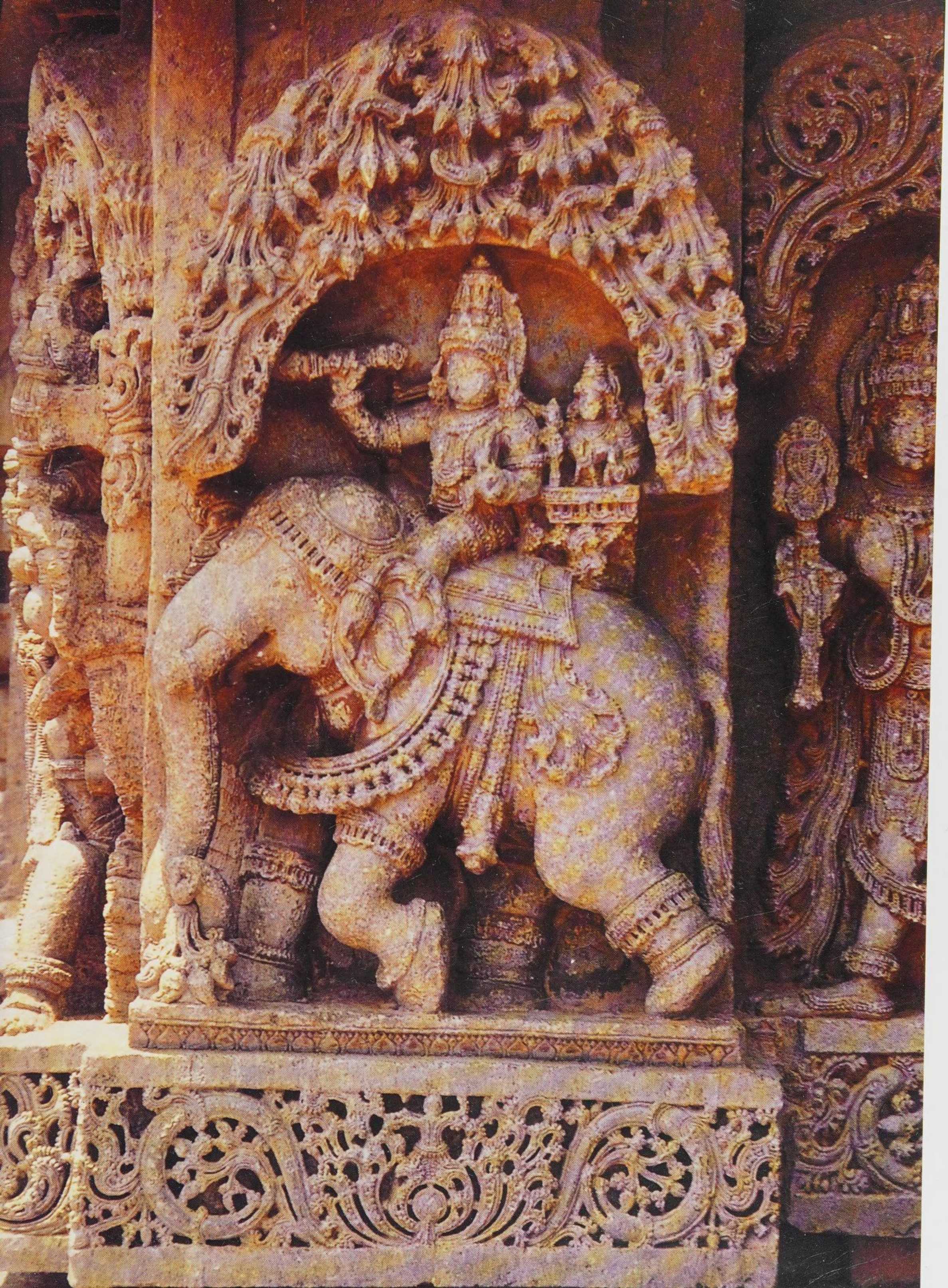
Images of Airavatha in his own right appear at two other sacred sites. Larger than life and strikingly unadorned, a monolithic elephant stands amidst the Pancha Ratha group of prototypal shrines at the 7th-century Pallava seaport of Mammallapuram in South India. Another boulder nearby is sculpted as a lion, *vahana* of goddess Durga. Similar but taller sculptures (badly damaged) of a lion and an elephant preside over the forecourt of Ellora's architectural climax, the monolithic rock-cut temple of Kailasanatha. At both sites, the presence of the animals alone is adequate to endorse the sanctity of their settings.

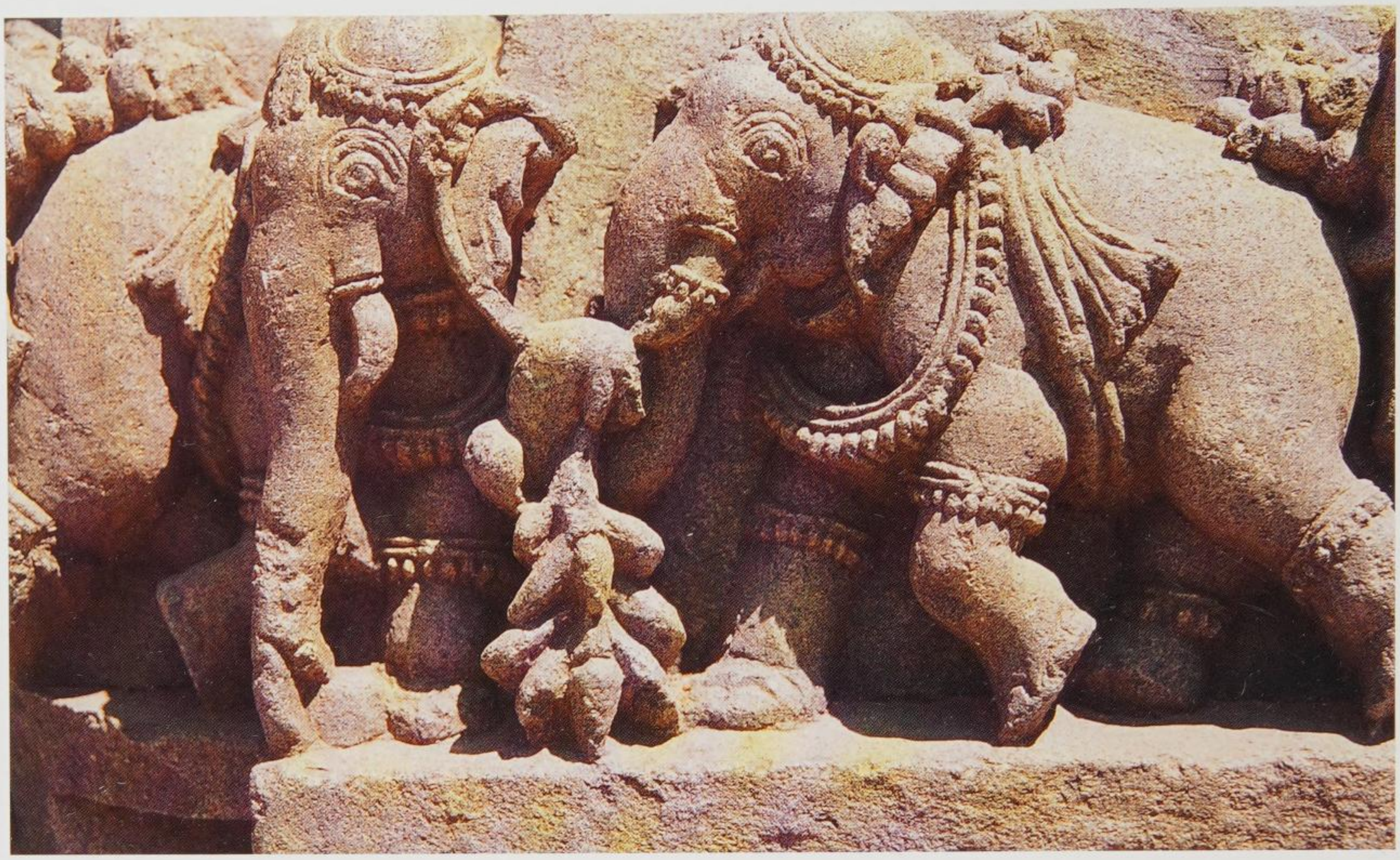
In the Hindu almanac, the onset of the rains marks a period when Vishnu, ever-benign god of eternity, rests from his labours in the universe in preparation for another aeon of creation. His couch, afloat on the cosmic ocean, is the multi-hooded serpent Anantha. Images of the recumbent god as Anathashayana, or 'He who sleeps on Anantha', are ubiquitous in Hindu iconography. One of the most compelling examples is preserved at the Dashavatara Temple of Deogarh in Central India.

Set on a high plinth, this jewel-like shrine of the 6th-century Gupta Period consists simply of a square sanctuary capped by a crumbling tower. A richly carved doorway and three large sculptural panels depicting episodes from Vaishnava myths adorn the exterior walls. The celebrated dreaming Vishnu is carried on the southern facade (Fig. 5). Every detail in the composition revolves around the central idea of restfulness and calm. In attendance on the god are his consorts, Shridevi (massaging his feet) and Bhudevi, and his man-eagle *vahana*, Garuda. The serpent's composite hood forms a canopy over Vishnu's head. A party of six other divinities—miniaturized to suggest the great distance between heaven and the ocean—occupies the space above. Surveying the cardinal directions from a lotus-throne in the centre is Brahma, the Creator. The divinities on either side are captured in mid-flight: the youthful Karttikeya rides a peacock; his parents Shiva and Parvati soar on Nandi the bull; a garland-bearing seraph hovers in the extreme right-hand corner. True-right of Brahma is the king of gods on his elephant. Indra holds aloft his emblem, a thunderbolt, as if leading the way. The allusion to rain and rejuvenation is fleeting but unmistakable.

An invention of the Rig Veda, Indra's *vajra* is the most frequently depicted of the god's numerous weapons. Unlike other mythical armaments that are usually bestowed upon their owners by divine forces, the thunderbolt is custom-made for the weather-god to help him destroy the demon of drought. During the battle, Indra is in danger of being defeated by Vritasura. The other gods advise him to approach Dadicha, a sage who had attained great powers through his austerities, and implore him for the use of his thighbones in crafting an invincible weapon.

Facing page:
6. Indra and Indrani on Airavatha
Wall panel, schist,
Lakshminarayana Temple,
Hosaholalu, Southern India,
Hoysala Period, 13th century.





7. Elephants carrying mangoes
Detail of basement friezes, schist, Keshava Temple, Somnathpur, Southern India, Hoysala Period, 1268.

To save the universe from impending doom, Dadicha forsakes his physical body. Indra takes the sage's femurs to the celestial blacksmith, Tavashtra, who forges them into a weapon of devastating power and unalterable form. Fashioned as two tridents pointing in opposite directions, the *vajra* may be thrown and also may unleash its powers when held in the god's hand. Its unchanging quality ensures the permanence of its magic. Indra returns to the battlefield and destroys Vritasura. Clouds ensnared by the demon are liberated and gather in the sky. It begins to rain and the universe is saved.[4]

A typical representation of the god and his principal emblems occupies a small alcove in the walls of a 16th-century Nayaka-Period temple to Rama in Kumbakonam, South India. Indra is shown seated on the elephant in the formal attitude of an icon of worship. One pair of Airavatha's quadruple tusks is clearly defined. Indra clutches the thunderbolt—complete with scallops of lightning—delicately in his right hand; his left hand bears the *paranja* lance. In the sumptuously decorated walls of a 12th-century Hoysala temple in Hosaholalu, South India, the interpretation of a celestial scene presents the air of an earthly royal procession (Fig. 6). Decked in finery, Airavatha strides fluidly past a *kalpavriksha,* depicted here as a mango tree laden with fruit.[5] Indra steers his vehicle in the characteristic manner of a mahout: feet tucked behind the animal's ears to urge it forward. Seated behind in a tiny *howdah* (seat for riding), his consort, Indrani, carries a miniature *vajra* of her own. As the procession advances,

Above:
8. Elephant and peepul tree
Medallion on railing post, sandstone, Stupa 2, Sanchi, Central India, Shunga Period, 2nd century BCE.

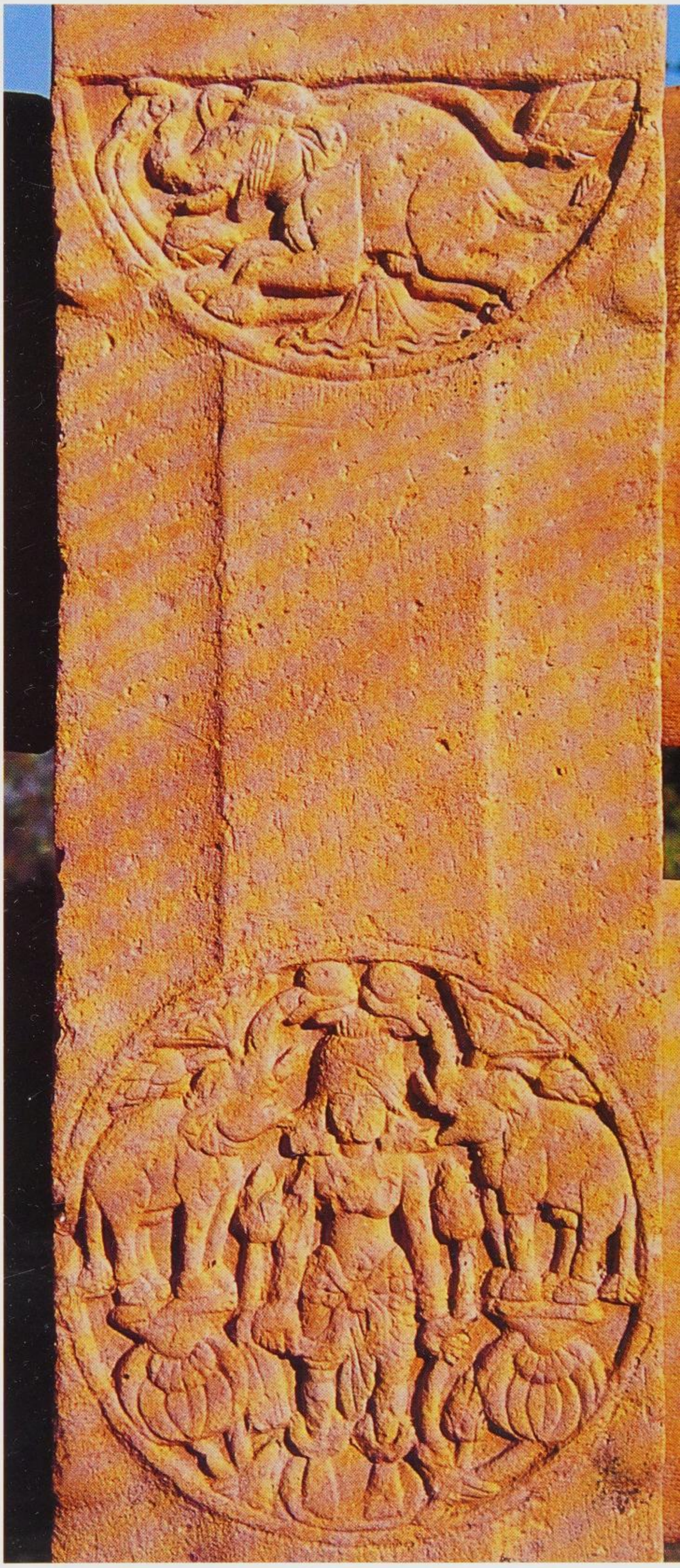
Below left and right:
9, 10. Elephants and lotuses
Medallions on railing posts, sandstone, Stupa 2, Sanchi, Central India, Shunga Period, 2nd century BCE.

Airavatha trails a bunch of mangoes in the ground before his feet. The thunderbolts foretell rain; the cloud-elephant consecrates the earth with a traditional symbol of fertility in promise of another season of abundance.

Vegetal themes in Indian art are filled with symbols that may not always be obvious. Stylized plants and trees which can be recognized in reality provide lush backdrops for divinities and fauna to go about their designated duties. Flowers and fruits are symbols of life and regeneration. The ambrosial mango, for example, is a particular favourite of the gods and is present everywhere in sacred art as an auspicious fertility symbol. The fruit may sometimes be borne in the trunks of elephants other than Airavatha: at the Keshava Temple in Somnathpur, Southern India, it is war elephants that undertake the service (Fig. 7). Some plants and trees have more direct associations with particular faiths. In Sanchi, Central India, a carved medallion on the railings of a 2nd-century BCE stupa shows a peepul tree—sacred to Buddhism—sprouting from the mouth of an elephant (Fig. 8). In other medallions from the same monument, elephants strike poses amidst giant blooms of another plant held sacred throughout the subcontinent (Fig. 9, 10).

The lotus thrives best in still and marshy water. That such magnificence should spring from a murky habitat lends the flower its classic symbolism of purity and perfection. Given their natural affinities to water, lotuses and elephants are often portrayed together in art: the Sanchi monument alone features over a hundred variations of this theme. In many of the medallions, the animals stand entwined in lotus blooms and foliage; in others, the plants issue directly from the elephants' mouths. In one vertical panel, a parakeet investigates the foliage sprouting from the elephant. The imagery throughout is symbolic: the elephant represents water, the source of life itself; the plants are life, and all life-supporting organisms.

Lotuses and elephants, moreover, enjoy a shared mythology. In the Puranic ocean-myth, one of



Page 18:
11. Gajalakshmi
Detail of pilaster, red sandstone, Dashavatara Temple, Deogarh, Central India, Gupta Period, 6th century.

Page 19:
12. Gajalakshmi and swimming elephant
Medallions on railing post, sandstone, Stupa 2, Sanchi, Central India, Shunga Period, 2nd century BCE.

13. Gajalakshmi
Detail of door lintel, green chlorite, Mahavihara 1, Ratnagiri, Eastern India, Pala Period, 7th–8th century.

the many sacred personifications to emerge from the churning is Lakshmi, the goddess of beauty and prosperity. She surfaces from the ocean seated on a thousand-petalled lotus and accompanied by two elephants.[6] Themselves standing on lotus blooms, the animals collect milk from the ocean in golden vessels and lustrate the goddess in a symbolic act of purification. That elephants perform the ritual is an indication of their own sanctity, and of their associations with evaporation, clouds, rainfall and renewal.

The adoration of Gajalakshmi, or 'Lakshmi of the Elephants', is a recurring motif in Buddhist, Jain and Hindu iconography. One of the railing medallions of Stupa 2 shows Lakshmi standing in a lotus, flanked by her attendants on their own lotus-calyx pedestals. Another elephant swims in a lotus pool in the half-medallion above (Fig. 12). In a pilaster medallion on the Dashavatara Temple in Deogarh, Gajalakshmi holds up her right hand in a gesture of blessing; her left hand clutches the remnant of a lotus stalk. The surrounding stonework is awash with elaborate swags of foliage. The overflowing-urn motif above it is another metaphor of abundance (Fig. 11).

14. Caparisoned elephant
Detail of parapet, sandstone,
Kandariya Mahadeva Temple,
Khajuraho, Central India,
Chandella Period,
mid-11th century.

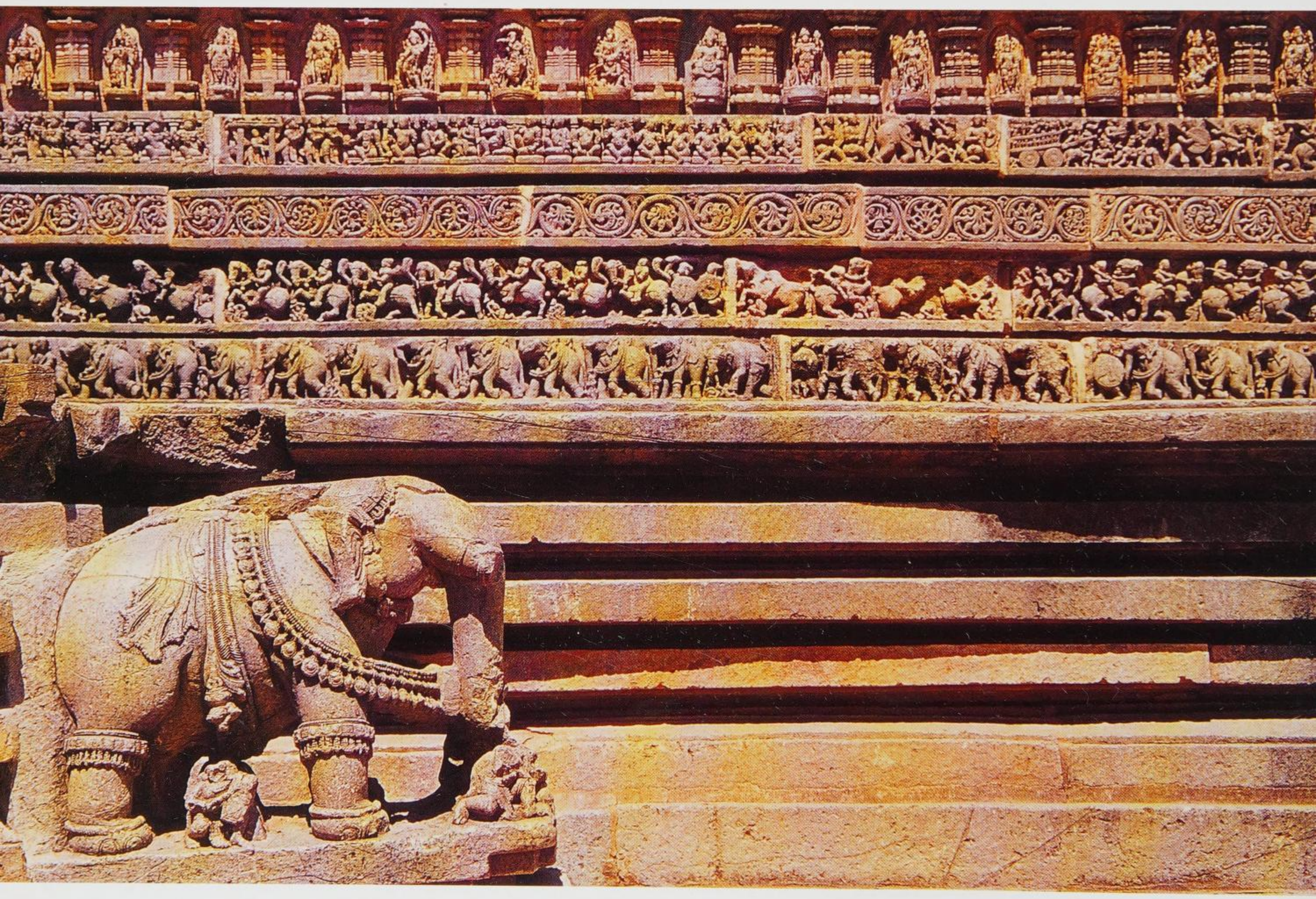
More usually, images of Gajalakshmi appear as carved centrepieces in gateways and door-lintels so that anyone passing beneath may be 'showered' with the goddess's munificence. A particularly fine example is carried in the opulent green-chlorite doorway of a 7th-century Buddhist *vihara* in Ratnagiri, Orissa. The detail shows Lakshmi seated in her classic *padmasana* (lotus-throne pose). The elephants are borne high above Lakshmi's shoulders on slender lotus stalks. A pattern of calyxes and watery lotus foliation carries the theme of lushness and fertility throughout the doorway (Fig. 13). At Ranakpur, Western India, traces of a once-opulent Gajalakshmi moulding can still be discerned in a ruined shrine alongside the Adinatha Temple. The base of the shrine is carved with more elephants and figures of lions and Jain divinities. In Ellora, a large-scale composition of Gajalakshmi greets the visitor into the Kailashanatha Temple. Facing the main entrance of the complex, the rock-cut panel shows the goddess accompanied by not two but four elephants. The two pairs represent the same animals, in two consecutive stages of the lustration ritual. Witnessing the proceedings over Lakshmi's shoulders is a congregation of divinities.

If Airavatha and Gajalakshmi's elephants have their origins in the mythical ocean, a different Puranic legend traces the genealogy of 16 original elephants to a mythical golden egg. After the fabulous man-eagle, Garuda, had hatched from an egg that had lain dormant for 500 years, Brahma collected the two halves of the eggshell and uttered seven magical charms over them. From the eggshell in Brahma's right hand came Airavatha, followed by seven male elephants.

From the other half in his left hand emerged eight female elephants.[7] Uniting the eight pairs, Brahma ordained the elephants guardians of the universe and assigned them to the cardinal and intermediate points of the compass. Known as the Ashtadikgajas (elephants of the eight directions), the pairs are neatly accounted for by name and designate positions: Airavatha and his mate, Abhramu, guard the east; Pundarika and Kapila (south-east); Vamana and Pingala (south); Kumuda and Anupama (south-west); Anjana and Tamrakarni (west); Pushpadanta and Shubradanti (north-west); Sarvabhauma and Angana (north); and Supratika and Anjanavati (north-east).[8] Airavatha remains the king of the elephants and simultaneously fulfils his duties to Indra.

In addition to the Ashtadikgajas, the Puranas also mention four other male elephants that are the offspring of Airavatha and Abhramu. Known simply as the Dikgajas, the sole function of the quartet is to support the universe on their shoulders at the cardinal directions. They are Himapandura (in the north), Mahapadmasama (south), Virupaksha (east) and Saumanasa (west).[9]

15. Elephant and processional scenes
Basement sculpture and *adisthana* friezes, schist, Keshava Temple, Somnathpur, Southern India, Hoysala Period, 1268.



The Puranas describe the Ashtadikgajas as winged creatures that fly about, changing their shapes and colours at will—a picturesque allusion to cloud-formation. In an elegiac tale of their later fortunes, a flock of youngsters one day settle on the branch of a huge banyan tree in the Himalayas under which sat a sage, Dirghatapas, presenting a discourse.[10] Enraptured by the sage's eloquence, the elephants lean forward. Predictably, the branch snaps and falls, instantly killing one of the sage's disciples. Oblivious to the bedlam they have caused, the elephants rise into the air and perch on a different branch. Enraged, Dirghatapas hurls a terrible curse: from that day on, all elephants would lose the gift of flight to wander instead on earth, constantly thirsting for water and in the service of humans. The parent-Ashtadikgajas, however, are spared the sage's wrath and beg him to forgive their children. The curse is, of course, irreversible. Dirghatapas instead assures the elephants that there would soon appear on earth another sage, Palakapya, destined to be partial to the eccentricities of earth-bound pachyderms.

As the story unfolds, Palakapya materializes as foretold. In the course of his good works, he shares his knowledge of elephant-magic and medicine (*gaja-shastra*) with a mythical king, Romapada (Lotus-foot)—a name that suggests that its bearer is himself an elephant. Palakapya's mythical monologue reappears in the form of an instructional discourse in three different Sanskrit treatises on the life and lore of the Indian elephant. The best known, the *Matangalila*, is a collection of 263 verses that flit without warning between fantasy and fact—the latter pertaining mainly to the care and husbandry of domesticated elephants. Attributed to an otherwise unknown author, Nilakantha, the exact provenance of the work remains uncertain.[11]

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As the four mythical Dikgajas support the universe, so elephants in sculpture lend themselves to a feature in sacred architecture known as the *gaja-pitha* (elephant-platform). This may occupy either the *adisthana* (base) or *upapitha* (sub-base or plinth) of a shrine or temple, and consists of a range of elephants' foreparts, standing in repose or charging outwards towards the viewer. The symbolism not only alludes to the mythical caryatids of the universe, but also makes a more direct reference to the proverbial strength of elephants—best suited to 'supporting' the dwellings of the gods upon their shoulders.

It is not imperative, however, that all temples possess a *gaja-pitha*. A quite different feature, also optional, is the *gaja-thara* (elephant-course): a horizontal frieze of elephants, generally in the lowermost register of sculptures in the *adisthana*. Unlike the conventionalized foreparts of the *gaja-pitha* elephants, *gaja-thara* elephants may be rendered in profile—marching in procession or in war and hunting scenes.

The scale and styling of a *gaja-pitha* can range from the modest to the monumental. The animals too may appear as shallow relief carvings or as bolder,

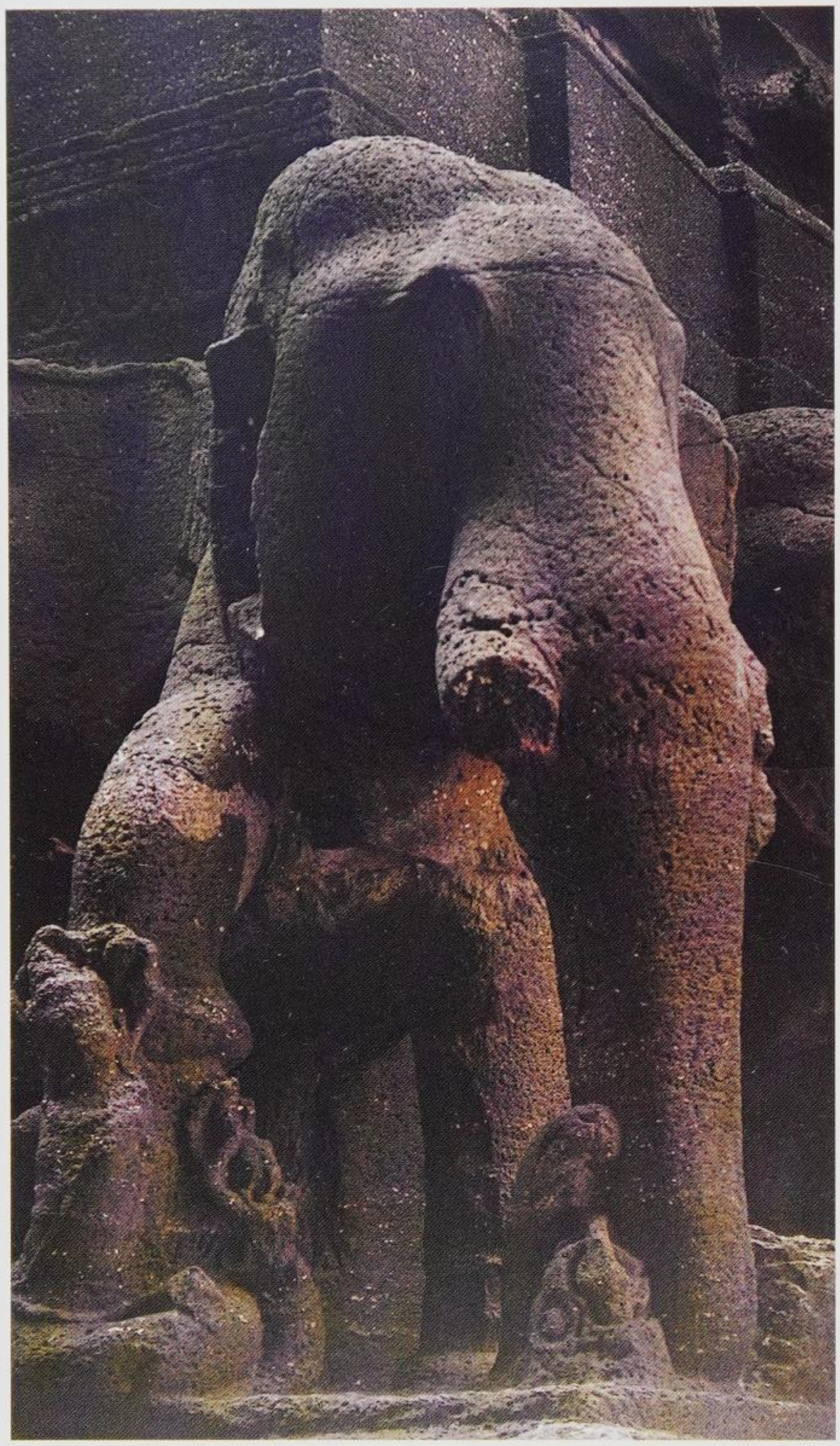
fully modelled sculptures. Two different interpretations are presented in two early-Chalukya temples in the Deccan. In the Badami example, a seemingly random arrangement of elephants' foreparts protrudes from the sides of a high *upapitha*, while a pair of sculptured lions guards the entrance stairway. In the *adisthana* of the Pattadakal temple, a moulding of rampant elephants is loosely interspersed with the foreparts of lions. In a typical example of the exuberant Hoysala style, the stellated *upapitha* of the Keshava Temple in Somnathpur has a set of richly decorated elephants radiating at ground level from the sides of the plinth. Some of the sculptures support rainspouts on their heads. In the *adisthana* of the temple proper, the *gaja-thara* presents a finely worked procession of war elephants (Fig. 15).

Variations of elephant-platforms and elephant-courses enrich virtually all of the 10th to 11th-century Chandella monuments of Khajuraho in Central India. In the *adisthana* of the Lakshmana Temple, for example, the *gaja-pitha* elephants alternate with figures of slender, staff-wielding men; the animals themselves have oddly human expressions. Lower down, the *upapitha* of the same temple displays a highly animated *gaja-thara* of military processions and hunting scenes. Each elephant here is unique in styling and mood. Accompanying them are foot soldiers and horses, deer, wild boar and even hunting dogs. In Western India, the *adisthana*s of two near-contemporary temples—the Mahanaleshvara in Menal and the Samadhishvara in Chitorgarh—are articulated with almost identical tiers

18. ***Nara-thara, gaja-pitha* and *kirthimukha*s**
Sculptures in *adisthana*, sandstone,
Samadhishvara Temple,
Chitorgarh, Western India,
Solanki Period,
11th–15th centuries.

Facing page:
Above:
16. Sparring elephants and dog
Basement sculptures, sandstone,
Lakshmana Temple,
Khajuraho, Central India,
Chandella Period, 954.

Below:
17. Wild-boar, horse and elephant
Basement sculptures, sandstone,
Lakshmana Temple,
Khajuraho, Central India,
Chandella Period, 954.



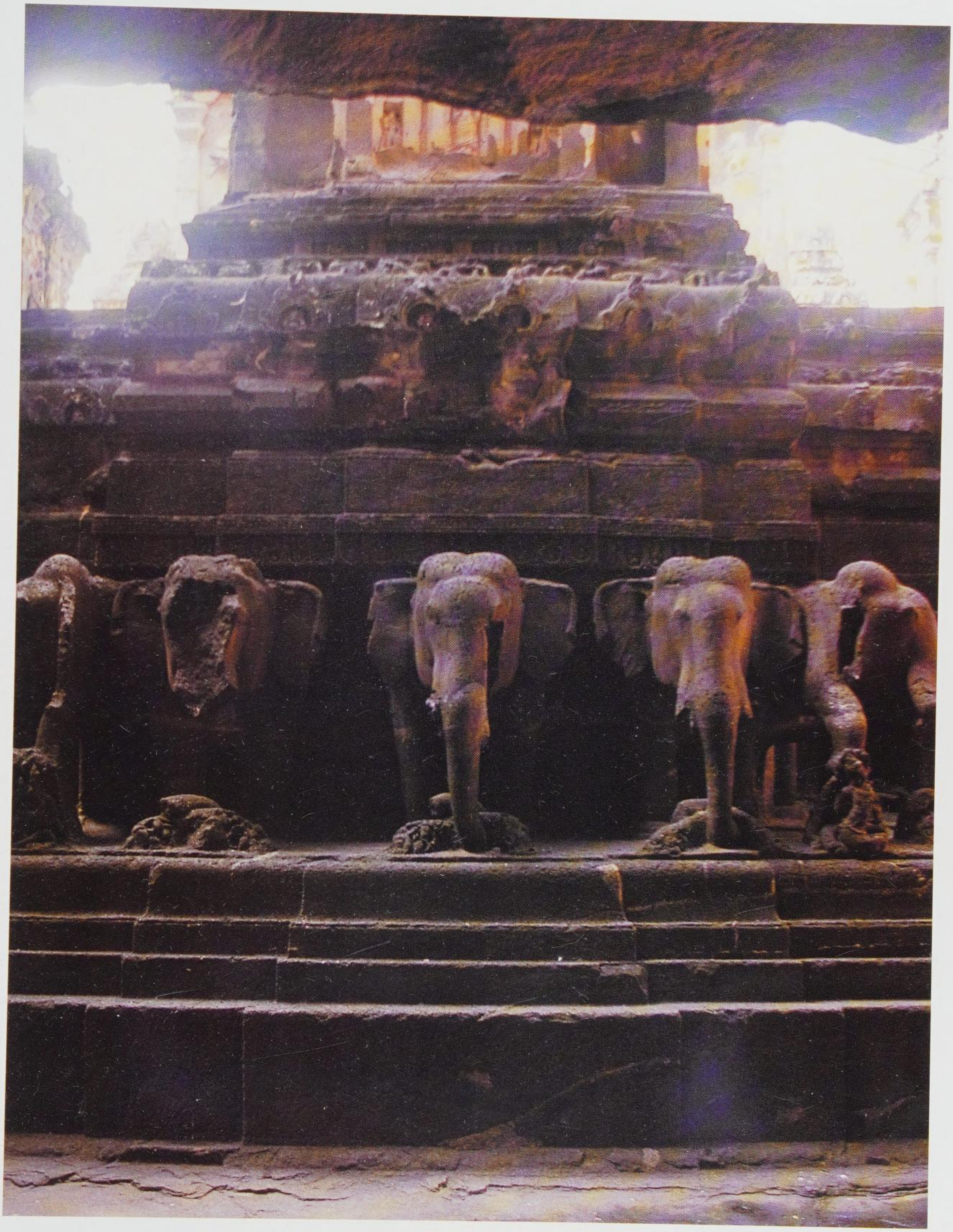
19. Caryatidal elephant with *naga*
Detail of *adisthana*, basalt, Kailashanatha Temple, Ellora, Deccan, Rashtrakuta Period, mid-8th century.

Facing page:
20. Caryatidal elephants
Sculptures in *adisthana*, basalt, Kailashanatha Temple, Ellora, Deccan, Rashtrakuta Period, mid-8th century.

of basement sculptures: the *gaja-thara* in both temples is sandwiched between a *nara-thara* (frieze of human figures) and a band of *kirthimukha*s (lion-masks) (Fig. 18). Jokes and visual puns pop up in the most unexpected places in temple sculpture: one of the elephants in the Chitorgarh, for example, has the face of a frog.[12] At Tribhuvanam in South India, the face of a *gaja-thara* elephant morphs into that of a bull.

For sheer drama and impact, however, nothing surpasses the *gaja-pitha* of the Kailashanatha Temple in Ellora. Rising from the middle of the rock-cut courtyard, the monolithic sanctuary of the temple proper—itself conceived as a mountain—conveys the impression of being borne aloft on the backs of dozens of life-sized elephants. Deeply sculpted from the mauve-black basalt, the lotus-gathering mock-caryatids survey their setting from a lofty plinth. In the northern and southern facades the elephants are interspersed with prancing lions and fabulous hybrid creatures; one of the elephants seems to be languidly shaking its foot free of a *naga* (snake) (Fig. 19). The rear, eastern face of the temple is given over entirely to the elephants, where the statuesque array of forequarters—eternally plunged in shadows—looms from the haze with quiet realism (Fig. 20).

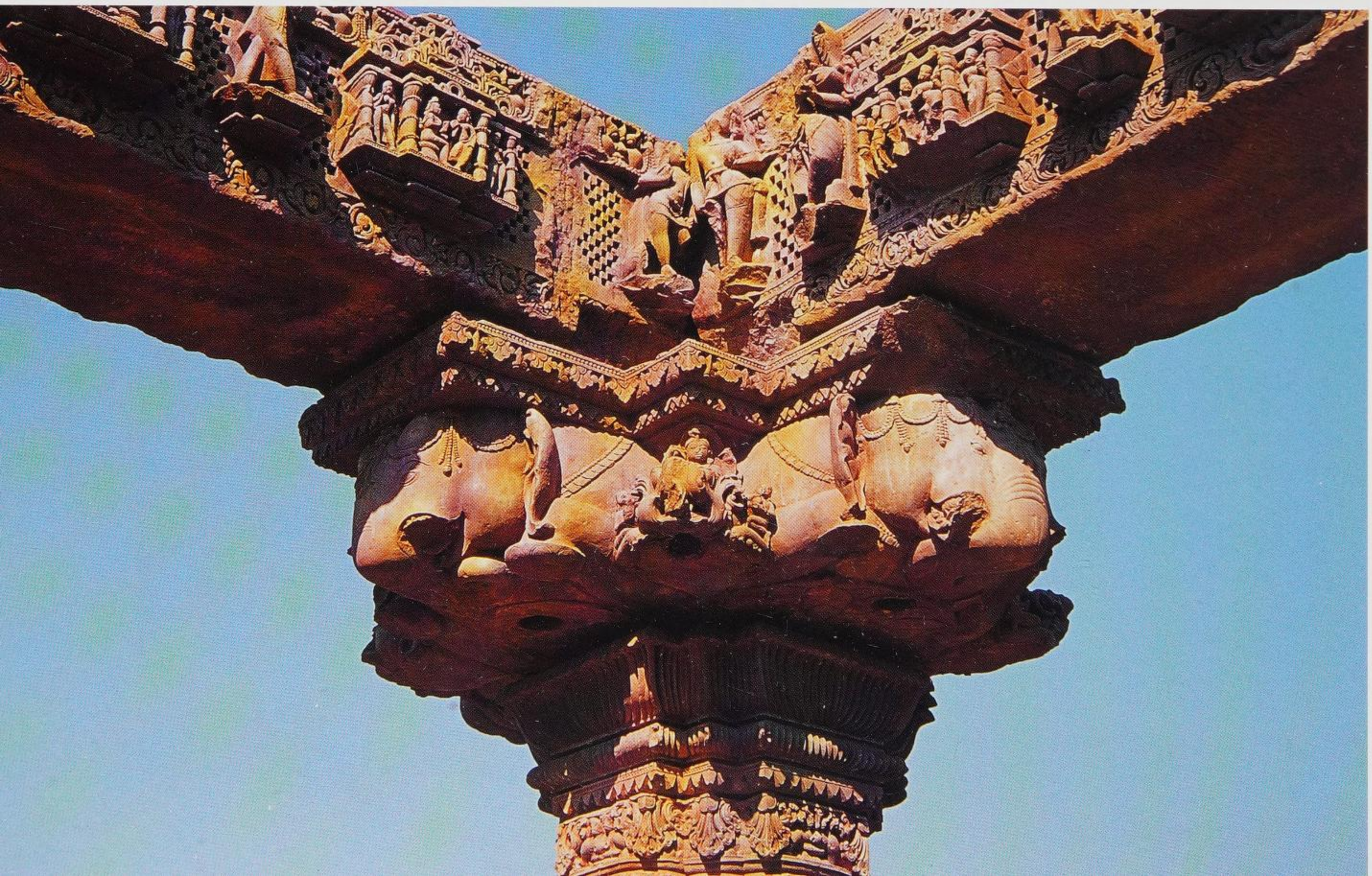
Symbolic references to the Ashtadikgajas can be found in a number of other structural details in sacred architecture. At Gyaraspur, Central India, the four surviving columns of a ruined Pratihara-Period shrine are each decorated with four brackets carved as elephants' heads. The animals' trunks are coiled in compact spirals; the architraves of the structure are 'supported' on the 16 elephant heads (Fig. 21). From the high roof-ridges of the temples of Khajuraho, caparisoned elephants gaze out in all directions at their verdant surroundings (Fig. 14). A similar idea is expressed at Ranakpur, in the carved uprights to the parapets and clustered entrance pavilions of the Adinatha Temple. These elephants have their trunks wrapped around sprouting *keval-vriksha*s (wish-fulfilling trees), sacred to Jainism.

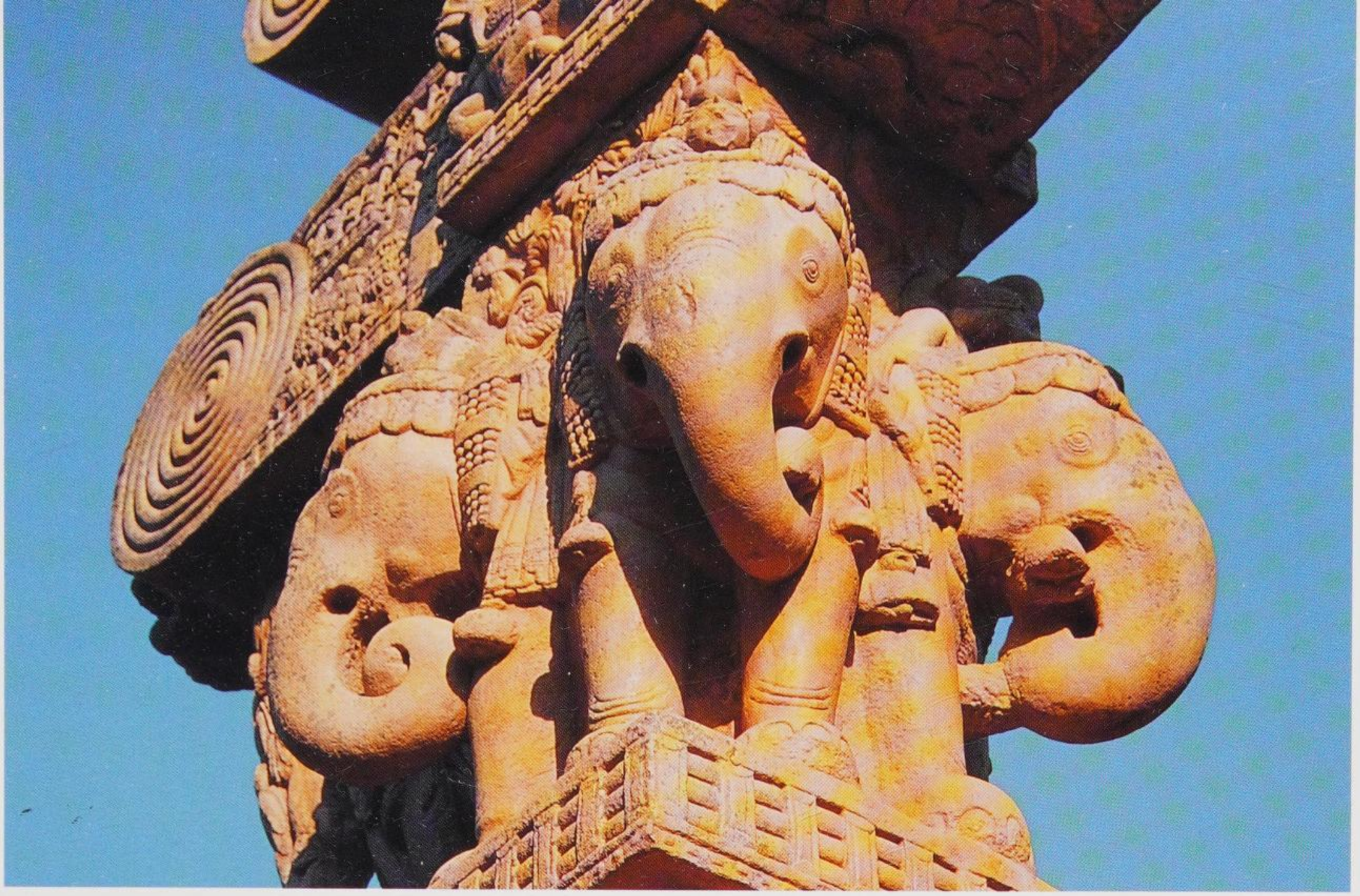


Buddhist art and literature encompass a delightful repertoire of symbols and metaphors, many of them drawn from the natural world. Animals, birds, and even insects, reptiles and fish help illustrate ideas and convey fundamental concepts of the faith. In what must be one of the richest tributes paid to any animal in history, Sariputta, one of the principal disciples of the Buddha, likens the guiding spirit of Buddhism to the footprint of an elephant. The simile is explained in the *Maha-hathipadoppama Sutra* (Sermon of the Great Elephant-Footprint): just as the footprints of all creatures may be contained within the single footprint of an elephant, so the vast canon of Buddhist theology may be encapsulated in the Four Noble Truths.

Nowhere in Indian sculpture does the elephant serve as the vehicle of a faith with more variety and exuberance than at the Great Stupa of Sanchi—the largest and most complete example of its kind to have remained largely intact since the 3rd-century BCE Maurya Period. Originally built of brick, as a smaller reliquary mound, the stupa was enlarged during the 2nd-century BCE Shunga Period to the dimensions it appears in now and was surrounded by a high railing of sandstone balusters and crossbars. The next phase of architectural accretion dates from the late 1st century BCE to the early 2nd century CE Satavahana Period, when the railings were embellished at the cardinal directions, with four *torana*s (sandstone gateways). In silhouette and carved details, these imitate

21. Elephant capital
Detail of column and architraves, sandstone, Chaukhamba Temple, Gyaraspur, Central India, Pratihara Period, 10th century.





22. Elephant capital
Detail of north-gateway,
sandstone, Great Stupa,
Sanchi, Central India,
Satavahana Period,
1st century BCE–2nd century CE.

older traditions in timber-construction techniques. It is here that the elephant of Buddhist sculpture comes into its element.

Standing about 28 feet high, each gateway consists of a pair of square posts surmounted by triple architraves. Every conceivable surface of these towering structures is covered with intricate relief carvings that illustrate scenes from the life of the Buddha and stories of his previous incarnations as a Bodhisattva (enlightened being). The Buddha himself is always represented by symbols such as a *bodhi* (peepul) tree, a votive stupa, the *Dhamma-chakra* (Wheel of Law), and so on. Although the carvings are mainly concerned with religious and mythological themes, they also provide a vibrant pictorial record of everyday life, architecture and the natural environment of Central India at that time. Everywhere in the carvings, elephants show up in hundreds, fulfilling a multiplicity of functions as symbols, structural details, mythical characters, royal mounts, cavalry animals and forest-dwellers.

In the north-gateway, the tops of the gateposts are modelled as groups of four elephants standing shoulder to shoulder (Fig. 22). Originally trimmed with ivory or silver tusks, the figures are roughly aligned to the intermediate points of the compass. Similar groupings of lions and pot-bellied dwarves crown the south- and west-gateways, respectively. Directly above the dwarf-capitals, pairs of elephants are shown rising to their feet while their riders open parasols, as if in preparation for a ceremonial parade. The frieze in the lowermost architrave of the gateway describes the adoration of a *bodhi* tree by a herd of elephants.

23. Processional elephants and *yakshi*
Detail of east-gateway, sandstone, Great Stupa, Sanchi, Central India, Satavahana Period, 1st century BCE–2nd century CE.

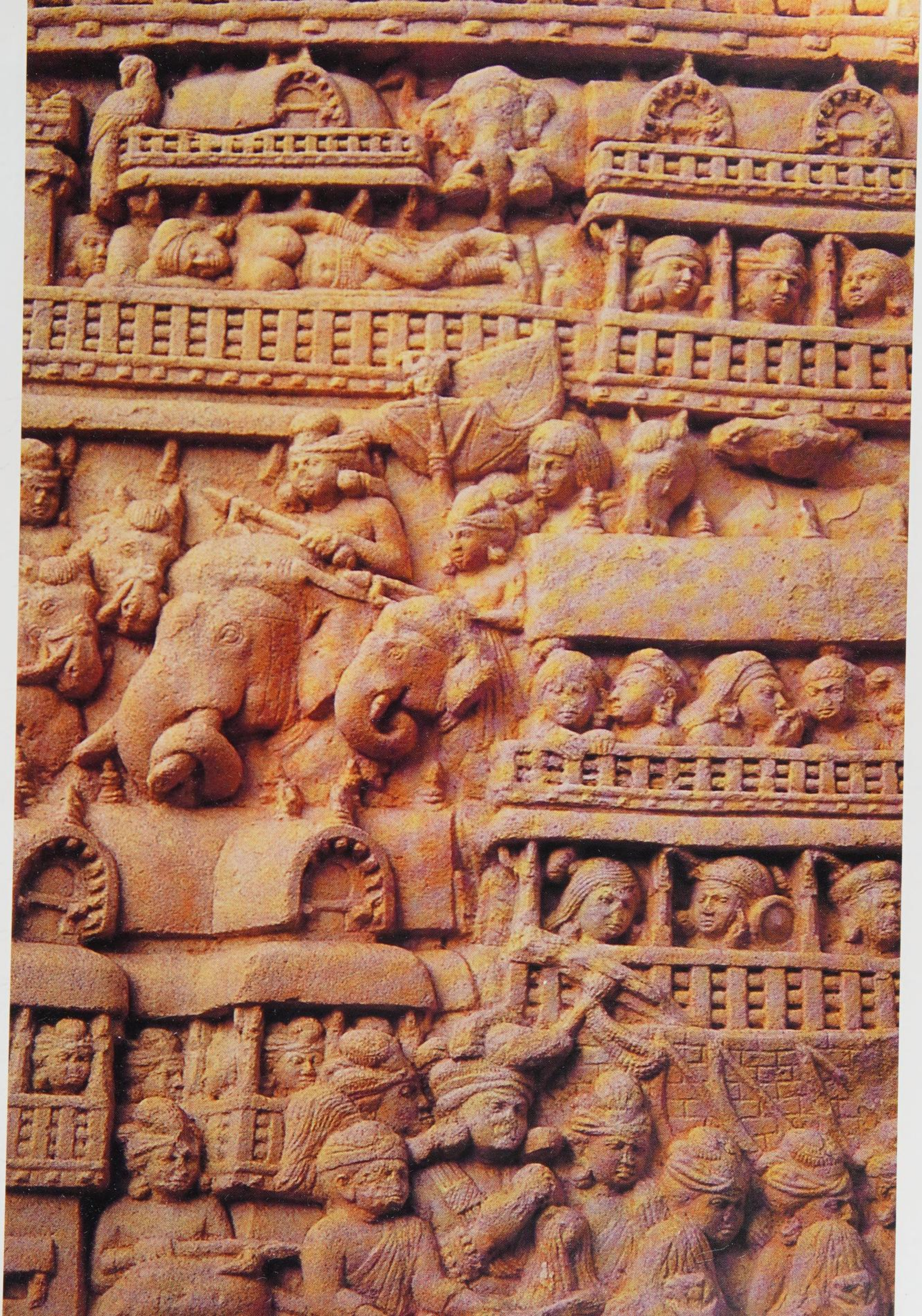
In the corresponding architrave of the east-gateway, a votive stupa is the focus of devotion of another herd of elephants.

Groups of four elephants reappear at the tops of the east-gateposts. The brackets projecting from the sides of the posts are fashioned as *yakshi*s (female dryads) draped sensuously around mango trees. As the elephants make stately progress around the shafts of the posts, the ensigns held by the riders are whipped up in a breeze (Fig. 23). Barely a few feet beneath the heraldic procession on the right-hand side gatepost, a detail in the relief carvings celebrates a momentous episode from the annals of Buddhism (Fig. 24).

According to Buddhist tradition, Mahamaya, chief-queen of Suddhodana, the Shakya king of Kapilavasthu, is believed to have dreamt one night that she was spirited away by the guardians of heaven to the mythical Anavatapta Lake in the Himalayas. There, the queen was bathed and clothed in fresh robes by four celestial nymphs and ensconced in a magnificent palace. As she lay on a bed, Mahamaya was visited by a silver-white elephant bearing a silver lotus in its trunk. The elephant circled the bed thrice, struck the queen's right side, and entered her womb. Mahamaya awoke to the call of a peacock; her dream was interpreted as an auspicious omen: she had conceived a child destined for everlasting fame, either as a great emperor or as a great teacher.

Ten months later, Mahamaya gave birth in a grove of *sal* (a species of trees) at Lumbini, near Kapilavasthu. Her child was Gautama Siddhartha—the prince who was to become the Buddha. Legend has it that moments after his birth, Gautama miraculously stood upright, walked seven steps, and declared that the life he had now entered was to be the last of his several rebirths.

Facing page:
24. Maya's dream, and scenes of Kapilavasthu
Detail of gatepost reliefs, sandstone, Great Stupa, Sanchi, Central India, Satavahana Period, 1st century BCE–2nd century CE.



25. *Chhaddanta Jataka*
(top architrave)
Inner face of north-gateway, sandstone, Great Stupa, Sanchi, Central India, Satavahana Period, 1st century BCE–2nd century CE.

The Buddha's recollections of his previous incarnations constitute a vast body of work known as the *jataka*s (birth-stories). Transcribed from the Buddha's discourses by an unknown hand around 450 BCE, the collection of 537 parables, verses and riddles (originally in the Pali script) are amongst the most popular works of early-Buddhist literature. Often strangely poignant, each *jataka* recounts an act of compassion and rescue carried out by the Buddha during successive rebirths as a Bodhisattva. In his transitions from one life to the next, he takes human as well as animal form. With his ultimate incarnation as Gautama, the Bodhisattva is finally liberated from the cycle of rebirth.

One of the best-known *jataka*s tells of the Bodhisattva's reincarnation as a six-tusked elephant named Chhaddanta.[13] Benevolent king of an imaginary Himalayan jungle, the elephant has two wives: Cullasubaddha and Mahasubaddha. Foraging in the jungle with his queens one day, Chhaddanta accidentally bumps against a giant *sal* tree in full bloom. At that moment, a clump of dry leaves, twigs

and red ants falls on Cullasubaddha, who stands on one side of the tree. Mahasubaddha, on the other side, receives a cascade of fragrant flowers. Cullasubaddha believes that she has been deliberately slighted. Fervently praying that she might one day be avenged, she pines away and soon dies.

On account of her prayers, Cullasubaddha is reborn a human princess and becomes chief-queen of the king of Varanasi. In her newfound glory, she feigns a terrible illness and declares that only the sight of the six magical tusks of a certain elephant can make her well again. She then instructs a hunter, Sonuttara, where this fabulous creature may be found and settles back to wait. Disguised as a hermit, the hunter sets off on a long and difficult journey and indeed finds Chhaddanta. He injures the elephant with a poisoned arrow but is unable to extract the tusks. As Chhaddanta lies grievously wounded, Sonuttara explains his mission. The elephant understands; he helps the hunter saw off the tusks and lies bleeding to death. Sonuttara returns with the trophies but the queen is devastated. It's too late for repentance or prayers; she instantly drops dead of guilt.

The *Chhaddanta Jataka* occupies a prominent position in the Sanchi monument. As if to emphasize its deeper meaning through repetition, the story recurs twice in the architraves of two of the four gateways. In the north-gateway, the pivotal forest scene fills the inner face of the uppermost architrave (Fig. 25). The imagery is idyllic, with little to suggest that trouble, in fact, is brewing under the tree. More figures of elephants adorn the gateway: these include a processional centrepiece, Gajalakshmi's attendants in a medallion, and the carved uprights between the architraves.

The *jataka* continues on the rear face of the central architrave in the south-gateway, where Chhaddanta is depicted four times in the continuous narrative.

26. Rescue scene No 7
Detail of Avalokiteshvara panel, basalt, Cave 7, Aurangabad, Deccan, Kalachuri Period, 6th century.

On the left-hand side of the frieze, he stands in a lotus pond accompanied by two other elephants that hold aloft a *chamara* and a ceremonial umbrella. In the next sequence, Chhaddanta has stepped out of the pond and moves towards a flowering tree that bisects the frieze. On the right-hand side of the tree, he walks with his surviving queen, Mahasubaddha, who fans her husband with a *chamara;* another elephant carries a ritual water-jar. In the extreme right-hand side of the panel, the hero stands alone in the shade of a tree, contemplating the preceding scenes. Only a minute detail in the corner shows the hunter inching forward to take aim.

In addition to Bodhisattvas such as Chhaddanta, the pantheon of Buddhist saviours includes other divinities who emerge from the Mahayana (Great Vehicle) branch of the faith. Unlike the *jataka* heroes, who transmigrate from one birth to the next, the Mahayana Bodhisattvas are believed to deliberately postpone their own passing in order to first assist the salvation of mankind. The most important is Avalokiteshwara (Lord who Watches over the World). Also known as Padmapani (Lotus-Bearer), the gently smiling divinity is venerated as protector of travellers; his classic iconography offers an unexpected insight into the preoccupations of travellers during ancient times.

With the spread of Mahayana Buddhism during the early centuries CE, a number of new *vihara*s and temples became established in various parts of the subcontinent. These were invariably situated in remote areas, conducive to monastic life, but never too far away from settlements on which the monks depended for mundane needs. Journeys between one monastic site and another were undoubtedly fraught with considerable risk. With little protection against the elements and physical dangers, calling upon the gentle Padmapani instilled perhaps a sense of security in ecclesiastical missionaries as well as in lay followers. At the many new establishments, therefore, images of Padmapani became influential icons of worship—addressing the petitions of weary travellers. Some of the best-preserved examples are at the rock-cut caves of Ajanta, Aurangabad and Ellora. In a large-scale wall panel in Aurangabad, the central figure of Padmapani is held between eight smaller scenes in which the Bodhisattva flies down to rescue his devotees from various ordeals. These range from shipwreck and serpents to bandits and fire—concerns that seem oddly familiar even today. Despite the animal's status in Buddhism, one of the perceived dangers comes in the form of a wild elephant (Fig. 26).

Facing page:
27. Elephant and rider bearing reliquary caskets
Rock-cut relief, sandstone, Jain Caves, Gwalior, Central India, Tomara Period, 7th–15th centuries.

The popular tale of the six blind men and the elephant is originally a Jain parable that illustrates a system of logic central to the faith known as Syadvad: all ideas may be explored from different points of view and all of these views are correct in their own right; to fully comprehend the implications of any idea, one must scrutinize it from different viewpoints. The image of the blind men

and the elephant, sadly, is confined to the Jain literary tradition. In Jain painting and sculpture, elephants feature mainly as a cognisant symbol and as attendant figures and royal mounts.

Given the strictly formalized iconography of the 24 Jinas or Tirthankaras (saviours), it is virtually impossible to tell one from the other without their respective cognisant symbols. These include animals and sacred objects. An elephant identifies the second Tirthankara, Ajitanatha; it is usually depicted at the saviour's feet.

The Tirthankaras are all considered to be of royal lineage—each one of them a prince who renounced the worldly existence to follow a path of extreme asceticism. As an acknowledgement of their former privileges, the Tirthankaras are often shown flanked by caparisoned elephants. At the hill-fort of Gwalior in Central India, for instance, a group of towering Jina figures, carved from the living-sandstone hillside, are each embellished with a pair of triumphal elephants over the shoulders. In one carved detail, an elephant and its rider transport reliquary urns towards a prototypal Jain shrine (Fig. 27).

Other elephants in Jain art serve a more ritualistic role—mainly of adoration and worship. Inside the airy, colonnaded halls of the Adinatha Temple in Ranakpur, a group of large, fully modelled elephants placed at the cardinal directions face the central shrine which houses a quadruple image of Adinatha. Each clutches a freshly sprouting *keval-vriksha*, usually represented as turmeric plants. In the basement of the Parshvanatha Temple nearby, pairs of elephants have their trunks entwined in lotus plants.

In the countless battles between good and evil that enliven Hindu mythology, ogres of all forms try to destroy the universe to gain supremacy over the gods. The Puranic story of Gajasura—literally, 'elephant-demon'—varies little from a classic plot: an *asura* takes the form of a monstrous elephant and goes out on the rampage.[14] The gods in heaven watch helplessly and finally beg Shiva, the Destroyer, to bring an end to the menace. Shiva confronts the elephant and challenges him in a dance to the death. Following a predictable climax, the god flays the hide off the demonic form and wraps it around himself. Draped in this macabre cloak and dripping with the monster's blood, he proclaims his victory with a terrifying dance.

Depictions in sacred art of divine acts of retribution serve as constant reminders of the cyclic nature of creation, destruction and regeneration. The classic iconography of Shiva as Nataraja, the Lord of Dance, conveys the central idea of 'good' vanquishing 'evil' through a complex arrangement of symbols, postures and hand-gestures.

The darker side of Shiva's dance emerges with his manifestation as Gajasura-samharamurti (Slayer of the Elephant-demon). A vivid sculptural

Facing page:
28. Gajasura-samhara
Wall panel, sandstone,
Virupaksha Temple, Pattadakal,
Deccan, Early Chalukya Period,
c 745.

depiction at the Kashivishveshvara Temple in Lakkundi shows Shiva clutching Gajasura's skin around himself with five of his ten hands. The elephant's head lolls heavily to a side; its tail and one pair of stumpy legs have barely survived the elements. Weathering lends an added dimension to the imagery: like a leathery eggshell, the hide-cloak looks like it might crumble at the slightest hint of movement. Surrounding the grisly vignette is an unruly cluster of gods and goddesses, jostling, it would seem, for a better view. An equally animated rendering, at the Ghateshvara Temple of Badoli in Western India, shows a bearded and grimacing Shiva with a garland of skulls slung around his neck. The elephant-skin cloak is almost incidental in the composition. A less baroque version graces the courtyard of the Virupaksha Temple in Pattadakal (Fig. 28). Shiva here strikes a stiffly exultant pose; his smile is inscrutable. Gajasura's hide forms a taut backdrop that also defines the frame. Shiva suppresses the elephant's head with his left foot. His ancillary right arm assumes the *gaja-hasta* (elephant-hand) posture. The fingers pointing to the right foot are symbolic of leading the devout on the path to salvation.

29. *Vahana* of Sri Ranajira
Detail of sculpture, sandstone, Chaunsat Yogini Temple, Bheraghat, Central India, Haihaya Period, 10th century.

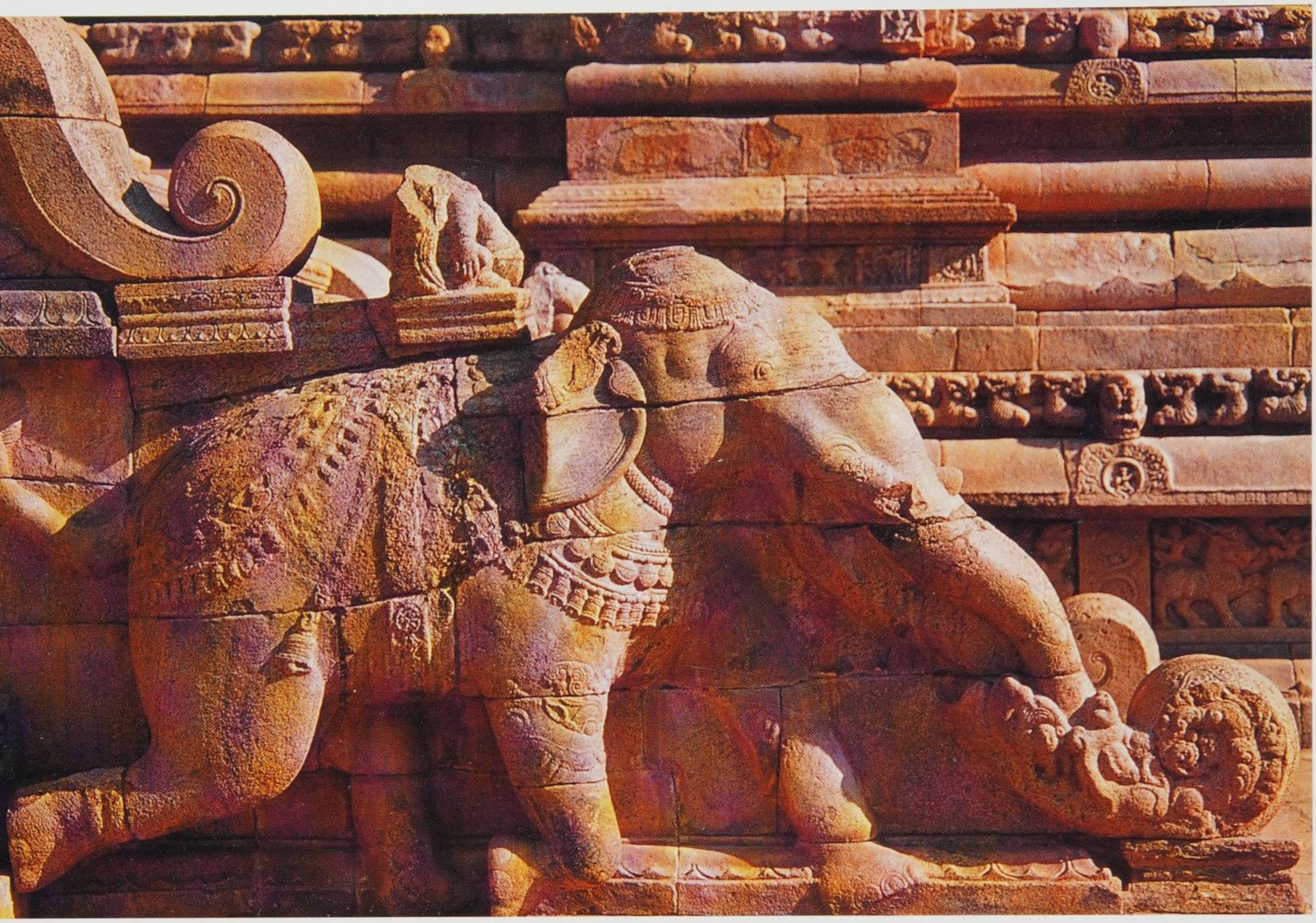
The hand of Shiva plays a significant role in the creation of Ganesha—much-loved elephant-headed god of wisdom and patron of literary and academic pursuits. The mythology of the rubicund deity is varied and complex. In the most

popular tale of Ganesha's creation, Shiva's consort, Parvati, fashions a boy-child out of rubbings from her own body and instructs him to guard the house while she goes in for a bath. Shiva returns home to find a stranger minding the front door. Because the obedient child denies him entry, Shiva lops the youngster's head off. Parvati emerges from her bath and is distraught. To mollify his wife, Shiva replaces the child's head with that of the first animal he comes across—which happens to be an elephant—and restores life into the little body.[15]

Also known as Ganapati (lord of the *ganas*), Vigneshwara (remover of obstacles), and Eka-dantha (one-tusked), Ganesha's blessings are invoked at the beginning of all new enterprises; his name or image may be inscribed in the opening pages of books and business ledgers. His enduring popularity as an icon of worship means that there are more shrines dedicated to him throughout India than to any other deity. His iconography, therefore, is hugely eclectic. An especially charming depiction, at a cave-temple in Udayagiri, Central India, shows the god seated on a ledge like a quiet and introspective child (Fig. 2).

30. *Gaja-vyala*
Basement sculpture,
khondalite, Sun Temple,
Konark, Orissa,
Eastern Ganga Period,
13th century.

The goddess Parvati is closely associated with the Shakti cult—a branch of Hinduism that revolves around the adoration of various female forces. A sub-cult is that of the Chaunsat Yogini (sixty-four demi-goddesses)—semi-autonomous attendants of Parvati. Restricted mainly to Central and Eastern India during the 9th to 12th centuries, the cult enjoyed an almost exclusively female following. Of the four Chaunsat Yogini temples that remain in India, the largest and best preserved, at Bheraghat in Central India, is ascribed to the patronage of two 10th-century queens of the Haihaya Dynasty. Within the complex, a badly mutilated but still stunning collection of large sandstone icons is ranged along the circumference of an open circular courtyard. The Yoginis bear human as well as animal faces. Each is identified by a nametag and has a *vahana* crouching at her feet. That of Sri Ranajira is an elephant (Fig. 29).



31. Elephant and *makhara*
Balustrade, granite,
Airavatheshwara Temple,
Darasuram, Southern India,
late Chola Period,
mid-12th century.

Fabulous hybrids of real and imaginary fauna occupy a realm of great vitality in the classic Indian bestiary. The most popular in sacred art are the *vyala*s—dragon-like creatures with leonine bodies and flaming manes, foliated tails and pointed ears, sharp claws, curving tusks and protruding eyes. A sub-species, the *gaja-vyala* (elephant-*vyala*), is characterized by a pronounced elephant-trunk. For all their terrifying attributes, however, *vyala*s are benign entities, positioned on the walls of temples to ward off inauspicious forces. The creatures come in diverse styles and sizes. In the 12th- to 13th-century temples of Orissa, a teeming population of *gaja-vyala*s rear between pilasters, clutching comatose warriors in their trunks and crushing trolls underfoot (Fig. 30). Sharing wall-space with Khajuraho's ecstatic lovers, they prance over crouching elephants with trunks entwined with prehensile tails. At Srirangam in South India, the piers of a ceremonial hall are each sculpted with figures of rearing horses, goggle-eyed *vyala*s, warriors and realistic animals; the *vyala*s and elephants amicably link trunks.

Sea-monsters and mythical serpents share a less cordial relationship with the elephants. A particularly vicious foe is the amphibious *makhara*—a crocodilian

hybrid with foliated jaws, clawed feet, feathery fins and flamboyantly scrolled tail. A 12th-century Chola balustrade in Darasuram, Southern India, illustrates a tussle between the two creatures (Fig. 31). At Gangaikondacholapuram, an intriguing detail features a giant snake devouring (or disgorging) a tiny elephant; the symbolism behind the image remains elusive (Fig. 32). Another fabulous monster is the shark-like *gaja-kurmaśin* whose name informs its favourite diet: elephants and tortoises. The creature's appetite is put to test in a Chalukya rendering at Pattadakal. Carved onto a column in the Virupaksha Temple, the scene describes the climax of a well-known Puranic tale of piety and deliverance: the *Gajendra Mokśha* (Gajendra's Salvation).[16]

In the story, a mythical king, Indradyumna—a staunch devotee of Vishnu—is at his prayers one morning when the sage Agastya arrives at the palace. Indradyumna cannot break off his prayers to receive the visitor; Agastya takes umbrage and curses the king that he may turn into an elephant. Emerging from his prayers, Indradyumna is horrified to hear that he has been cursed. As small consolation, Agastya tells him that the curse would only come undone if the king's beloved Vishnu were to ever reach out to save him.

Indradyumna becomes an elephant and retires to a forest as Gajendra, king of the elephants. Bathing in a lotus pond one day, Gajendra's foot is trapped in the jaws of a malevolent water-monster. The elephant struggles to free himself but the monster is stronger. As the water foams and rises about him, Gajendra throws up his trunk and utters a last, desperate appeal to the god he has venerated all his life. His prayer is at once answered—Vishnu descends from heaven and hurls his sacred *chakra* (discus) at the monster. The monster releases Gajendra and begs forgiveness of the god. The elephant is restored to his original, human form. As the ultimate reward for his devotion, Indradyumna is relieved of his earthly existence and transcends to Vishnu's Paradise.

The *Gajendra Mokśha* legend possibly represents a Puranic variation of the Rig Vedic episode of Indra destroying Vritasura to liberate the rain clouds. Here, the elephant-hero suggests a body of

32. Serpent and elephant
Detail of wall-sculpture, granite, Brihadishwara Temple, Gangaikondacholapuram, Southern India, Chola Period, mid-11th century.

water rendered unsuitable for consumption by the presence of a 'water-monster'. Vishnu, who has replaced Indra in importance in the Puranas, is alone capable of remedying the situation.

In the Pattadakal rendition of the story, a *gaja-kurmasin* is shown with its jaws clamped around a tortoise that in turn seizes the elephant's foot. Gajendra clutches a lotus bud. The celestial rescue-party is movingly sculpted: riding on Garuda's shoulders, Vishnu holds the *chakra* in his principal right hand and takes aim. Garuda's wings are lightly etched; the figure floating in the horizon represents Indradyumna after the curse is broken. Although smaller in scale, the modelling of the principal characters bears several similarities to an older interpretation of the story in Deogarh, Central India (Fig. 33).

The rescue-scene emerges with quiet grandeur on the northern facade of the Dashavatara Temple. The water-monster here is a *naga* king accompanied by his queen; the lotus pond is more evocative of a nest of mesmerised cobras. As Gajendra stands in their loosening coils, the *naga* couple gazes heavenwards with hands folded in penitence. Vishnu's expression is imperious, reminiscent of his features in the southern facade of the shrine, where other divinities had watched over his recumbent form. Here, a divine coronation awaits the elephant.

Facing page:
33. *Gajendra Moksha*
Wall panel, red sandstone, Dashavatara Temple, Deogarh, Central India, Gupta Period, 6th century.

Life and Surrender

Forest elephants that dwelt there happily and
by the power of fate have been brought to towns in bonds,
afflicted by sufferings of mind and body are unable for long to sustain life,
when from their own kind they have come into the control of men.

—Matangalila

Weathered by wind and rain for over two thousand years, a carved rock-face outside the Rani Gumpha (Queen's Cave), in Udayagiri, Orissa, powerfully recalls a timeless natural scene. Attrition has contributed to the impressionistic quality of the original (Fig. 34). In the composition, two elephants splash in a lotus pond. A second pair stands by the water's edge. A tree in the foreground lends scale and perspective; the background carries hints of more water and vegetation. The stances of the four animals suggest a trumpeting exchange—frozen in stone for as long as the elements permit. Nearby, the rock-cut doorway of the Chotha Hathi Gumpha (Little Elephant Cave), is embellished with a robust frieze of elephants coursing through a jungle (Fig. 35). From their overall mood to their finer nuances, both carvings bear ample evidence that the artists' observations were drawn closely from reality.

As fascinating as its mythical realms, the natural world of the Indian elephant has been subject of painting and sculpture since the earliest times. In addition to their obvious artistic significance, depictions of elephants in the wild also serve as verifiable indexes to various facets of the animal's natural history—notably its family-life and distribution. The jungles of Eastern and Southern India, for example, have always sustained large populations of elephants; it is in these regions more than others that wild elephants are frequently the focus of local artistic traditions. The realism evoked in the Udayagiri carvings, therefore, may have been all too familiar in the dense—and now non-existent—jungles surrounding the site. That encounters between the animals and humans were not always cordial is suggested in another sculptured panel at the Rani Gumpha: a regal, stick-wielding figure[1] valiantly defends his entourage from a marauding herd; the elephants look nonplussed at the intrusion. To the long-forgotten occupants of these ancient Jain *vihara*s, scenes such as these were clearly fascinating in themselves to merit recording in stone, either as life-studies or as anecdotal tales.

Because realistic depictions of animals and birds often appear side by side with mythological themes, it is sometimes hard to distinguish where fiction ends and fact begins, and whether the latter, if identified, is at all 'fact'. A typical example of overlapping ideas and inspirations is preserved at Mammallapuram in Southern India. Of the numerous Pallava monuments that dot the site, the most intriguing is a part-structural composition known variously as Baghiratha's Penance, Arjuna's Penance, and Kiratarjunya—reputed to be the world's largest bas-relief. Carved onto the east-facing surfaces of two enormous granite boulders, the continuous-narrative relief celebrates a Puranic myth of the descent of the river Ganga onto a land ravaged by drought.[2] A narrow vertical fissure between the boulders is skilfully integrated into the carvings to represent a waterfall, in which *naga* divinities are shown swimming upwards, towards the source. From both sides of the fissure, a host of heavenly beings and natural fauna surges forward to greet the flood. The creatures include lions, deer and antelope, monkeys, roosters and

Page 44:
34. Elephants at a lotus pond
Rock-cut relief, sandstone,
Rani Gumpha, Udayagiri,
Orissa, Chedi Period,
1st century BCE.

35. Elephants in a forest setting
Rock-cut doorway, sandstone,
Chotta Hathi Gumpha,
Udayagiri, Orissa, Chedi Period,
1st century BCE.

peacocks, a boar, a cat and even mice. Dominating this motley cavalcade is a family of elephants: a tusker, his mate, and several calves (Fig. 36).

Hidden from view, on top of the boulders is a ruined masonry trough. Originally, water representing the river flowed down the fissure to collect in the large rectangular cistern at the base of the composition. The effect of this spectacle can now only be imagined: lapping the feet of the elephants, the artificial 'ocean' would have reflected the entire sculptural tapestry that pays homage to the forces of nature.

Centuries of close observation find expression in the rendering of the elephants. In its physical attributes, the bull represents a prime specimen of the 'caste' referred to in ancient elephant-lore as *badhra* (noble) and in more contemporary treatises as *koomeria* (thoroughbred).[3] A steady gait and a reputation for remaining calm in times of crisis qualified animals of this particular class to their historic status as war elephants and royal mounts. A late–19th century commentator presents the following description:

> Barrel deep and of great girth; legs short (especially the hind ones) and colossal; back straight and flat but sloping from shoulder to tail; head and chest massive; neck thick and short; trunk broad at the base and proportionately heavy throughout; bump between the eyes prominent; cheeks full…the tail must be long but not touch the ground, and be well-feathered.[4]

Previous pages:
36. Elephant family
Detail of monolithic relief carving, granite, Bhagiratha's Penance, Mammallapuram, Southern India, Pallava Period, mid-7th century.

The words seem tailor-made for the *koomeria* bull in the Mammallapuram frieze, as he stands touching the water's edge with the tip of his trunk. A calf at his feet imitates the act. Three more infants crowd in the shade of the father's belly; one of them licks moisture from the ground exactly as baby elephants tend to do in reality. The mother elephant follows, delicately testing the air with her trunk. Her incurved 'tush' is typical of cow elephants of the Asiatic species. More calves jostle between the mother's legs. Bringing up the rear are two stragglers.

At first glance, the family portrait looks picture-perfect. But for all its touching details the depiction contains a number of striking—and in all likelihood, deliberate—aberrations. In a complete departure from natural order, the bull elephant is anointed head of this family. Elephant families, in reality, are always led by a matriarch; bulls have little to do with the welfare of their progeny.[5] Denied in art of her natural calling, the Mammallapuram cow follows, almost demurely,

with lowered eyes: her responsibilities here are clearly defined. Although elephants indeed make devoted mothers, they are neither placid nor prolific child-bearers as suggested in the carving. The infants, moreover, appear to be of uniform age—biologically impossible if they were born to the same mother—and all are males, equipped with incipient tusks that must one day grow into splendid symbols of masculinity. Viewed afresh, is the portrait actually an ancient Indian reflection of human ideals of family-life and social order? Do the elephants, in fact, represent a royal Pallava patron, his chief-queen and their brood of princes?

Any quest for a more reliable, sculptured natural history of the Indian elephant must end some 1000 miles up the coastline from Mammallapuram, at the colossal ruins of the Sun Temple of Konark in Orissa. Commissioned by the 13th-century Eastern Ganga King Narasimhadeva I as an earthly vision of the Sun

37. Elephants in a forest setting
Detail of basement friezes, khondalite, Sun Temple, Konark, Orissa, Eastern Ganga Period, 13th century.

God's chariot, the monument in its entirety is estimated to have originally stood a staggering 227 feet tall.[6] The tower over the sanctuary long gone, the temple-proper still retains a profusion of figural sculptures and ornamentation. Sharply worked in the coarse-grained khondalite are 12 pairs of massive chariot wheels, the remnants of seven life-size galloping horses, divinities, dancers and musicians, *naga*s and *vyala*s, and groups of courtly couples locked in ardent embraces. At ground level, a single band of sculpture—barely six inches wide—defines the base of the entire edifice. Documented here with astounding detail are approximately 1700 elephants—each one of them different and all drawn from life.

The action takes place in a forest setting. The elephants race past trees, fondle their young, spar against one another and swim in a river (Fig. 37). The private life of pachyderms also comes in for close scrutiny. In two separate details in the western face of the basement, bull elephants investigate cows in oestrus (Fig. 38). Courtship culminates in mating in a discreet corner in the south (Fig. 39). Another panel describes a birth-scene; the mother's extended family stands by in attendance. Punctuating the idyll at intervals are scenes of frenetic human activity. These re-enact highlights from an ancient elephant-trapping operation.[7]

The *Matangalila* recommended five different techniques of capturing elephants in the wild: lassoing; enticement with tame cow-elephants or *koomkie*s; chasing; the infamous pit-method; and the ominous-sounding drop-pen method. To carry out the first, lengths of rope ending in nooses were placed along well-used elephant trails in the jungle and covered with earth, leaves, and a selection of the animals' favourite foods. When an elephant stopped to investigate, herdsmen concealed in trees and in the undergrowth swiftly pulled taut the ground-ropes while others flung another noose around the animal's head, taking it by complete surprise. The technique, however, was not foolproof and was predictably fraught with risk. The drop-pen method, in comparison, called for fewer acrobatics. Select herds of elephants were surrounded and driven into specially constructed 'corridors' in the jungle that in turn led to large, circular corrals with drop-gates held in place with ropes. The moment the last elephant was in, the ropes were cut and the gates fell into place, hence the technique's name. When the ensuing mayhem had subsided (this could take one or more days) elephants with the most desirable qualities—chiefly size, spirit and appearance—were restrained and carefully led away to individual holding pens, for an arduous period of breaking-in and training. Animals not selected for domestication were usually set free.[8] The main advantage of the drop-pen method was that several elephants could be simultaneously captured in the course of a single roundup. It also resulted in fewer casualties on both sides. From beginning to the end, these carefully planned operations provided employment to large contingents of skilled labour. Ironically, they also enlisted the services of countless domesticated elephants, many of which would have lost their own freedom under similar circumstances and in the very same jungles.

Facing page:
Above:
38. Tusker with cow in oestrus
Details of basement friezes, khondalite, Sun Temple, Konark, Orissa, Eastern Ganga Period, 13th century.

Below:
39. Elephants mating
Detail of basement friezes, khondalite, Sun Temple, Konark, Orissa, Eastern Ganga Period, 13th century.

40. Wild elephant entering a stockade
Detail of basement friezes, khondalite, Sun Temple, Konark, Orissa, Eastern Ganga Period, 13th century.

In a chapter dedicated to the management of elephants and elephant-forests, the *Kautilya Arthashastra*—a king's primer to administration, written towards the end of the 4th century BCE—lays down terse regulations pertaining to trapping operations:

> The time for catching elephants is summer. A twenty-year-old should be caught. A cub; an elephant with small tusks; one without tusks; one diseased; a female with young and a suckling elephant should not be caught.[9]

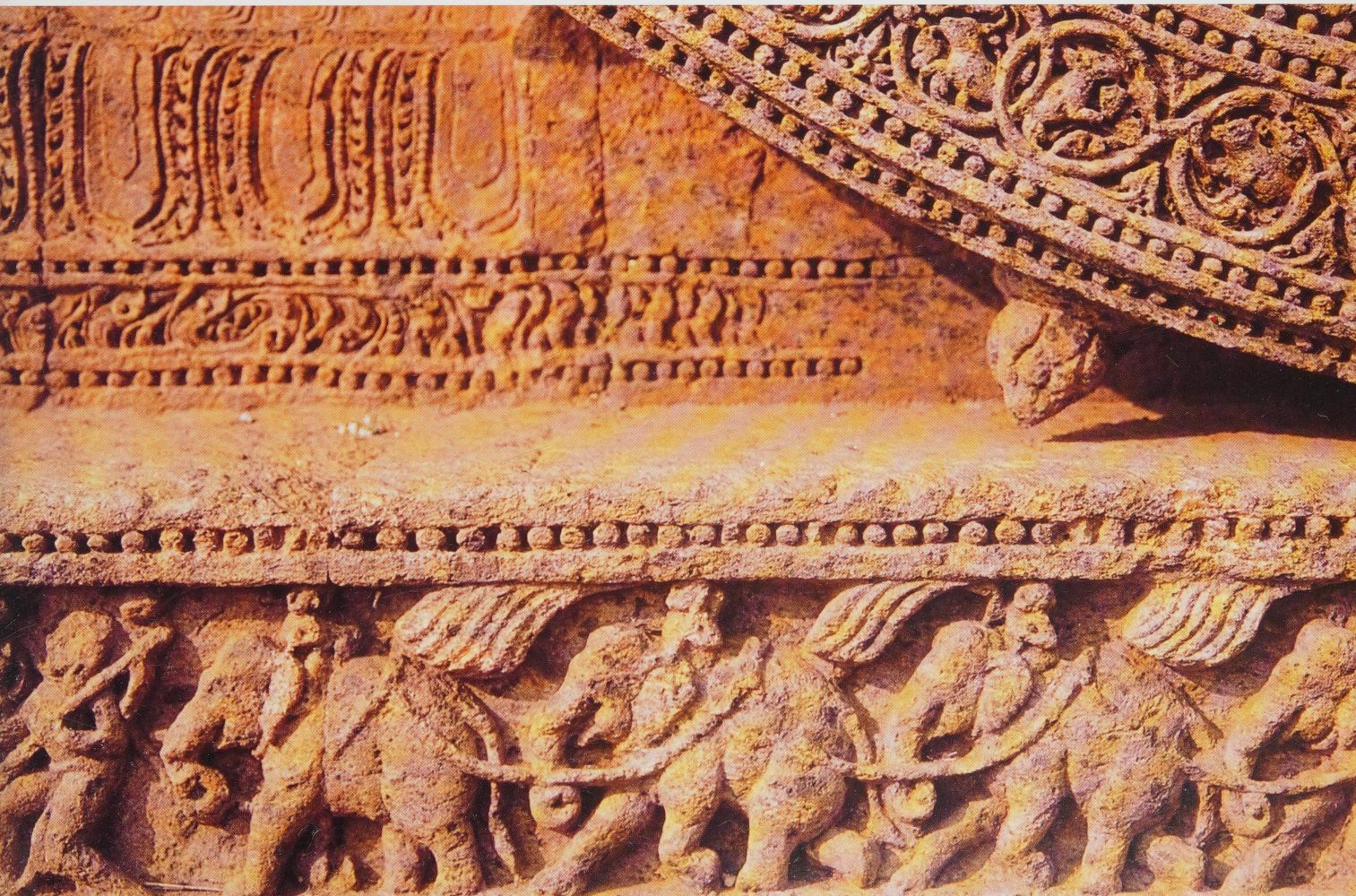
The logic behind these directives could not have been lost on practitioners: fully-grown wild elephants were generally more amenable to training and could be put to work in under six months of their capture. Selective trapping also justified the enormous time, effort and economics involved in launching a successful operation.

Both the lassoing and the drop-pen techniques are documented in the *gaja-thara* of the Sun Temple. Inch-high men lash together lengths of timber to construct stockades; others drive wild herds towards finished enclosures (Fig. 40). In one of the friezes, a trapper in a tree has lassoed an elephant while a co-worker on the ground quickly secures the animal's feet. In another frieze, an enraged bull tugs in vain at the rope that binds its ankles (Fig. 42). Elsewhere, two recalcitrant tuskers are goaded into submission, while more men restrain the animals from the safety of trees. In a particularly poignant scene, an elephant inside a pen watches

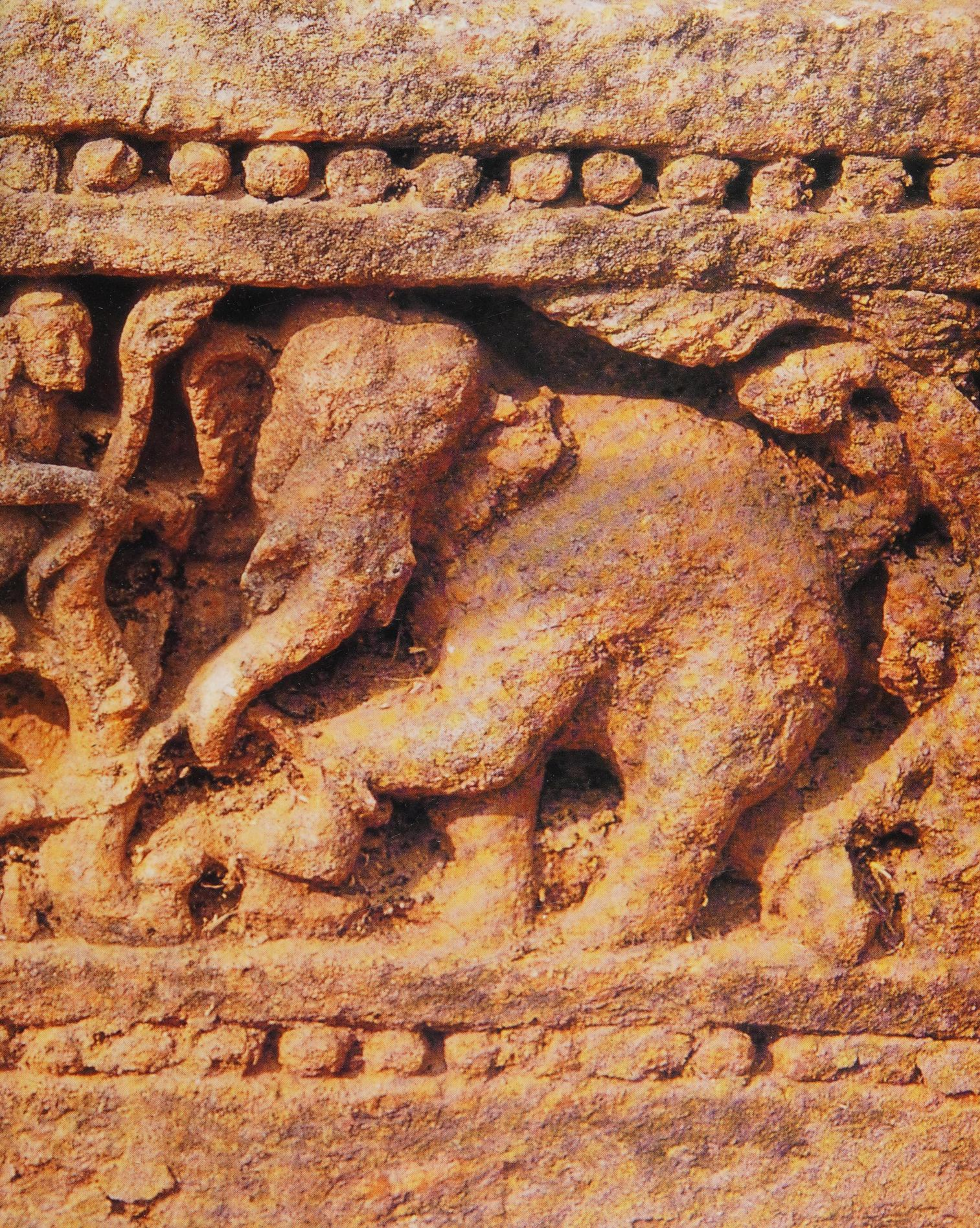
powerlessly as its captors secure the fastenings. Meanwhile, other captives are habituated to the proximity and touch of humans. At the base of one of the chariot wheels, a string of elephants—adequately subdued to allow riders on their backs—is led away for training (Fig. 41).

That the life and times of a single species should be so closely documented in the foundations, as it were, of the subcontinent's most ambitious architectural venture of the period speaks volumes. Clearly, the contents of this *gaja-thara* were intended to inform, entertain and possibly instruct—recording, for those who couldn't witness first-hand, a secret life and a human activity, both already well-established in the region.

Historically, the vast territories of the Kalinga Empire (modern-day Orissa and the northern tip of Andhra Pradesh) boasted of some of India's richest elephant-forests. The animals find frequent mention in the chronicles of foreign visitors to the region. The Buddhist pilgrim Hiuen Tsang, who travelled extensively in India during the early 7th century, describes Kalinga's elephants as exceptionally tall and dark-skinned creatures, much sought after for military work within the empire and in neighbouring kingdoms. In separate accounts from the 9th–10th centuries, the Arab adventurers Ibn Khurdabaih and Ibn Rusta[10] and the



41. Captured elephants being led away
Detail of basement friezes, khondalite, Sun Temple, Konark, Orissa, Eastern Ganga Period, 13th century.

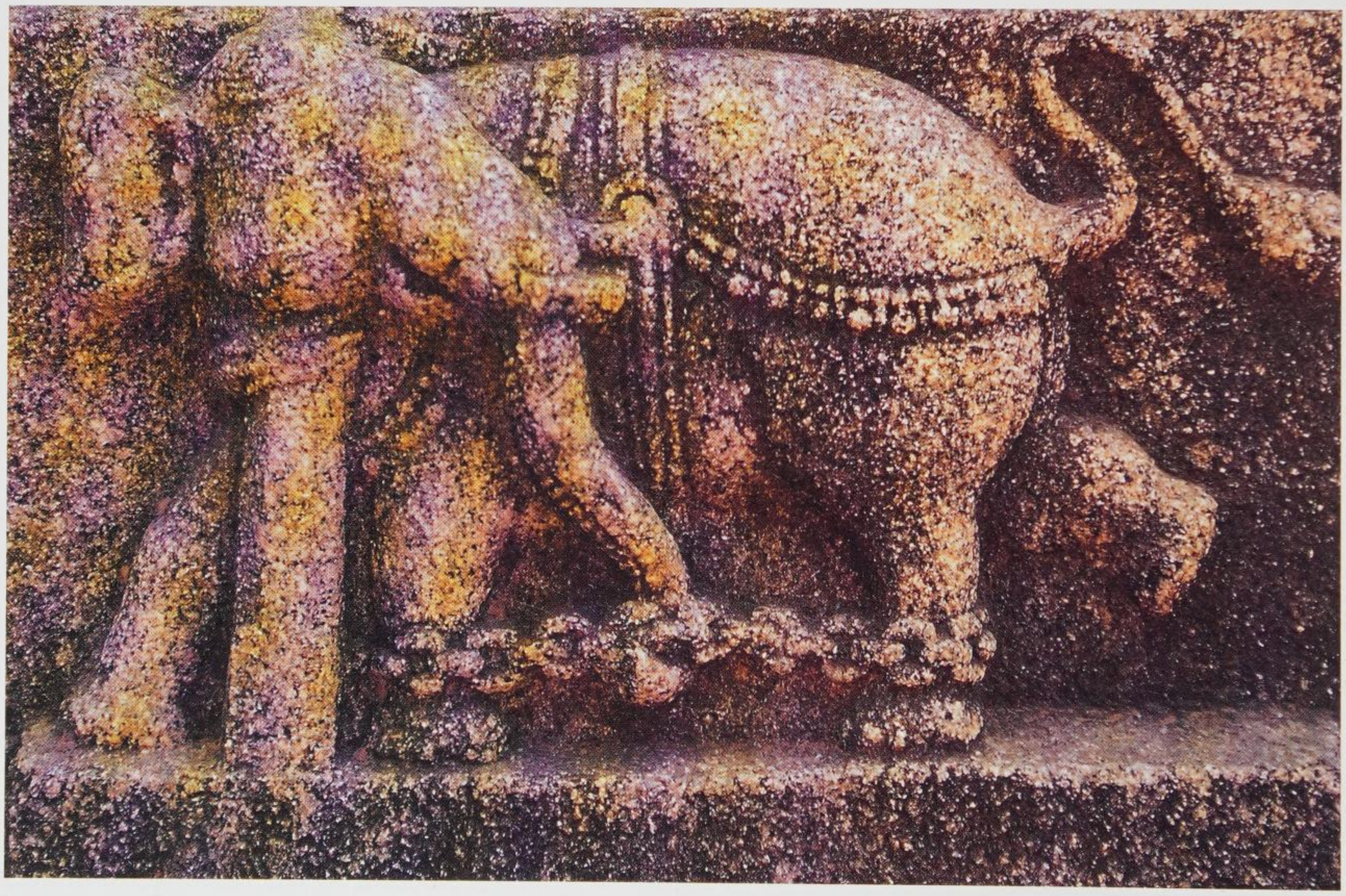


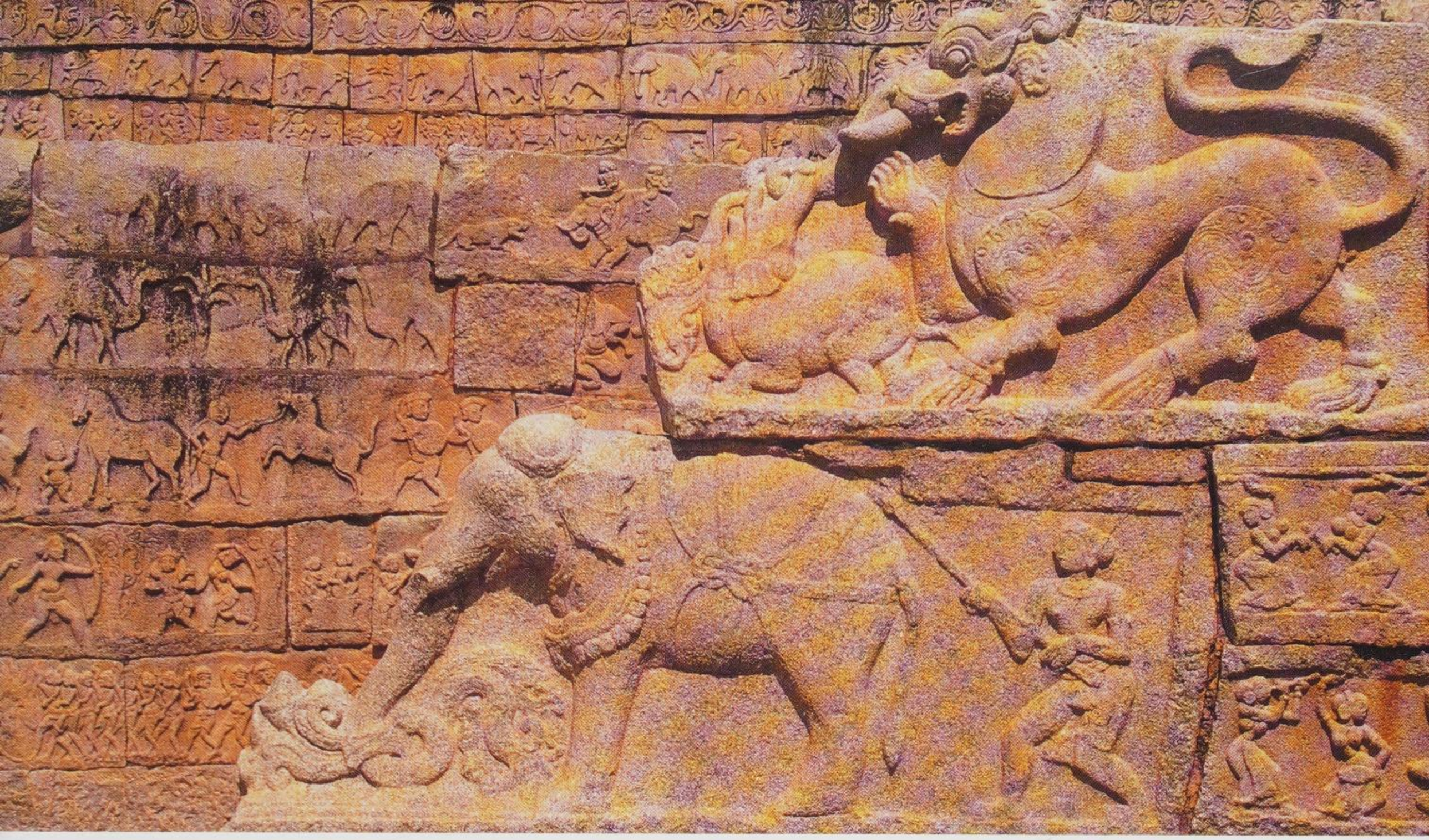
Previous pages:
42. Elephant being lassoed
Detail of basement friezes (shown approximately in actual size), khondalite, Sun Temple, Konark, Orissa, Eastern Ganga Period, 13th century.

anonymous author of the *Hudud al-'Alam* (a Persian geography of the known world, written c 982 CE) list Kalingan elephants accompanied by mahouts and handlers among the principal commodities of maritime trade[11] out of the East Coast of India to ports as far flung as Sicily and Zanzibar—for sale, ultimately, to the wild-animal shows of ancient Rome. Closer to home, Kalinga's elephants served as a powerful form of diplomatic currency, with more than one territorial dispute being settled with a bounty of prized *koomerias*. To meet the varied demands of trade and treaty, it was no doubt imperative that local kings ensured a steady supply of animals. The Konark friezes, therefore, seem a particularly fitting tribute to a species that not only contributed to the considerable fortunes of successive Orissan dynasties, but also to the construction of triumphal monuments like the Sun Temple.

43. Elephant in musth
Basement panel, granite, Hazara Rama Temple, Vijayanagara, Deccan, Vijayanagara Period, 15th century.

The other great empire to count elephants among its myriad fortunes was Vijayanagara—the most powerful political presence in the Deccan between the 14th and the 16th centuries. Vijayanagara enjoyed its own extensive elephant-forests and trapping traditions. Depictions of wild and domesticated elephants appear at all levels in the royal and religious architectural effects of Hampi, the headquarters of the empire. At the Ramachandra—also known as the Hazara-Rama or Thousand-Rama—Temple, the private chapel of the Vijayanagara kings, a set of



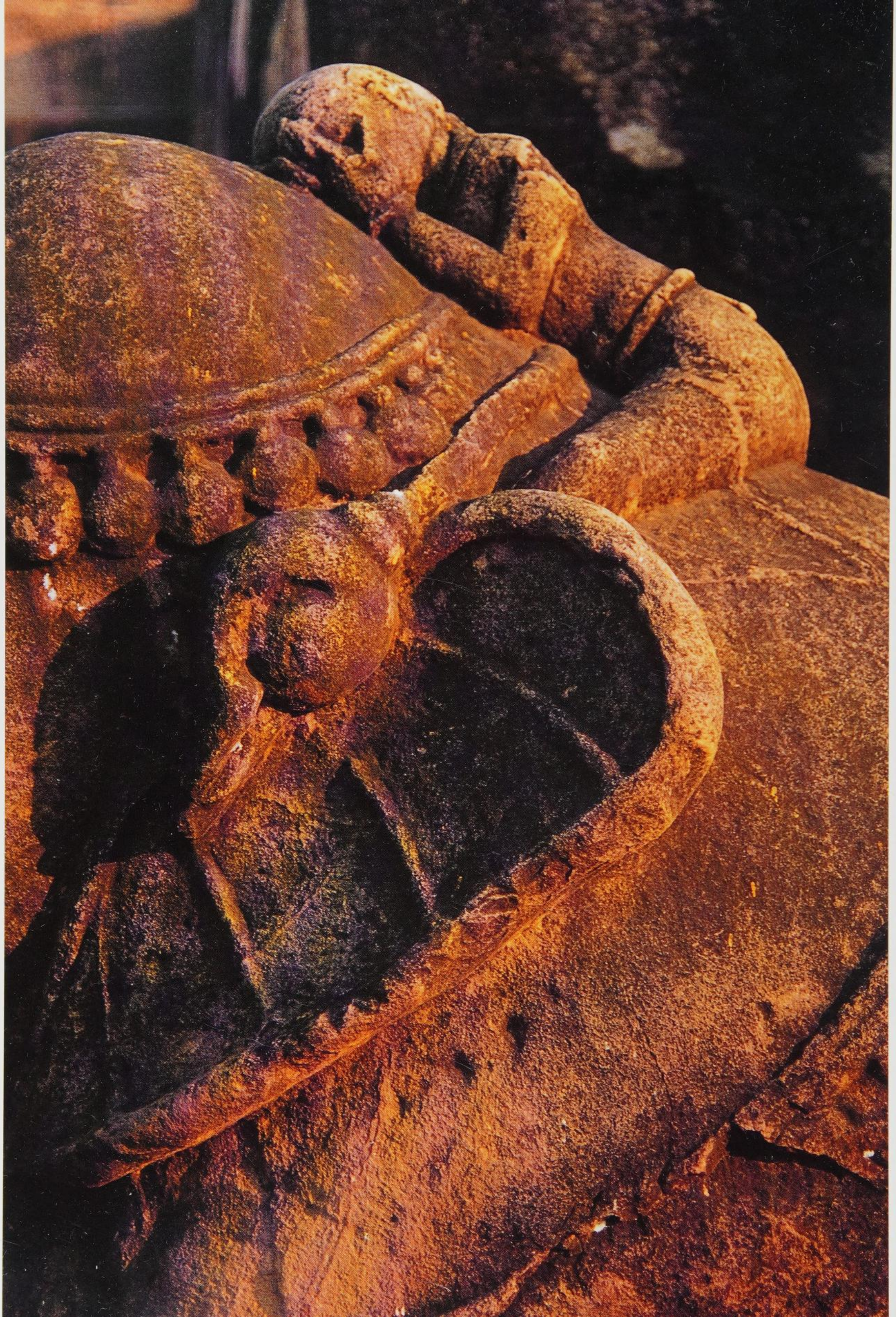


44. Elephant, attendant, *gaja-vyala* and *makhara*
Balustrade and basement friezes, granite, Mahanavami Platform, Vijayanagara, Deccan, Vijayanagara Period, 14th–16th centuries.

carved panels in the inner face of the entrance screen describe the different moods and activities of a working elephant: the animal calmly uproots a tree, is fed by its keeper, and so on. The most dramatic image in the series is of a tusker in rut (Fig. 43). Restrained with ropes to a post, the musth-maddened[12] animal swings round to pull at its fetters. Its trumpeting protests are almost audible.

Virtually every aspect of the elephant's temperament is recreated in sculpture at the exuberant Chandella monuments of Khajuraho. In the *gaja-thara* of the Lakshmana Temple, the elephant's trunk alone comes in for special treatment as it reaches out to caress, scent, entwine and grasp. The emotions conveyed range from tenderness and curiosity to mischief and aggression (Fig. 16).

Wherever there are domestic elephants so are their mahouts and attendants. Designed to emphasise the elephant's classic associations with great strength and stature, a recurring device in art is the deliberate exaggeration of the animal's proportions in relation to the human scale. In the *gaja-pitha* of a Nandi shrine in Khajuraho, for instance, staff-bearing attendants are considerably dwarfed by their crouching wards. In the *gaja-thara* of the Lakshmana Temple, elephants and soldiers enjoy almost equal billing while mahouts are relegated to a distinctly shadowy presence. In the basement of a pillared hall in Chidambaram, South India, a life-sized elephant stomps purposefully behind its elfin human companion. On the Mahanavami Platform in Vijayanagara, an impossibly minute mahout gamely steers his giant mount. A more proportionate keeper accompanies



the elephant in a balustrade in the same monument; a *gaja-vyala* and *makhara* tussle above (Fig. 44). That mahouts consistently appear as mere appendages of their animals is perhaps tribute in itself to an ancient profession that the *Matangalila* qualifies in pithy terms:

> An elephant driver may be of three sorts: satisfactory, ingenious, and powerful. The first acts simply according to the qualities of his elephant; the middle one, according to the qualities of both himself and his elephant; the last depends upon his own strength and powers alone. Thus elephant drivers are to be conceived as best, middling and poorest. Among these, the last is to be avoided.[13]

If domestic elephants worked hard for a living, they were amply compensated in care and attention of a standard generally reserved for humans of the greatest eminence. The hectoring voice of the *Arthashastra* suggests that 'the physician, the trainer, the rider, the driver, the guard, the decorator, the cook, the fodder-giver, the foot-chainer, the stall-guard, the night-attendant, and so on form the group of attendants'[14] to be employed in keeping a domesticated elephant in good health and cheer. The same voice goes on to stipulate that

> Un-cleanliness of the stall; non-receipt of fodder; making elephants sleep on bare ground; striking them at improper places; mounting by another person; riding at an improper time or on unsuitable terrain; leading down to water where there is no crossing and (no) thicket of trees are all occasions for penalty. He (the Superintendent of Elephants) should take from their (the offenders') food and wages.[15]

More often than not, mahouts and their elephants bonded for life—sharing an almost filial relationship based on mutual respect and trust. The essence of this unique camaraderie is perhaps best summed-up in a fully modelled sculpture that stands outside the Vishwanatha Temple in Khajuraho (Fig. 45).

Facing page:
45. Sleeping mahout
Detail of loose sculpture, sandstone, entrance to Vishwanatha Temple, Khajuraho, Central India, Chandella Period, 11th century.

Pomp and Circumstance

Warriors only fight; horses only draw chariots;
but elephants that are fit for a king both fight and draw.

—Matangalila

From the cloud-elephant in heaven to Airavatha's countless caparisoned counterparts on earth, 'royal' elephants are among the most potent symbols of the imperial splendours of ancient India. The animals are ubiquitous in figural art, performing a variety of 'noble' duties thrust upon them by religion, mythology, and the whims of their owners.

Traditionally, the role of a dynastic Hindu or Buddhist king was to represent God on earth, ensuring the spiritual and material welfare of his people and kingdom. In the model of the king of gods, only a king had the privilege of owning elephants; kings alone had the authority to permit trapping operations and the sale of captured animals. Because elephants (and horses) were valued above all else for their uses in warfare, the magnitude of the royal elephant stables was generally a measure of the owner's political and military powers, or absence thereof.

The classic Indian Army, as described in the Puranas and in the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, was made up of four divisions: elephants, cavalry, chariots, and infantry. A basic fighting unit or *chathur-anga* ('four-limbs') comprised of one elephant, one chariot, three horses, and five infantrymen. A total of 21,870 units formed an *akshauhini* (complete army), accounting for a mind-boggling 21,870 elephants, as many chariots, 65,610 horses, and 109,350 infantrymen. The *Arthashastra* offers less extravagant figures: a basic fighting unit could consist of 45 elephants, 45 chariots, 225 horses and 675 infantrymen. Five such units

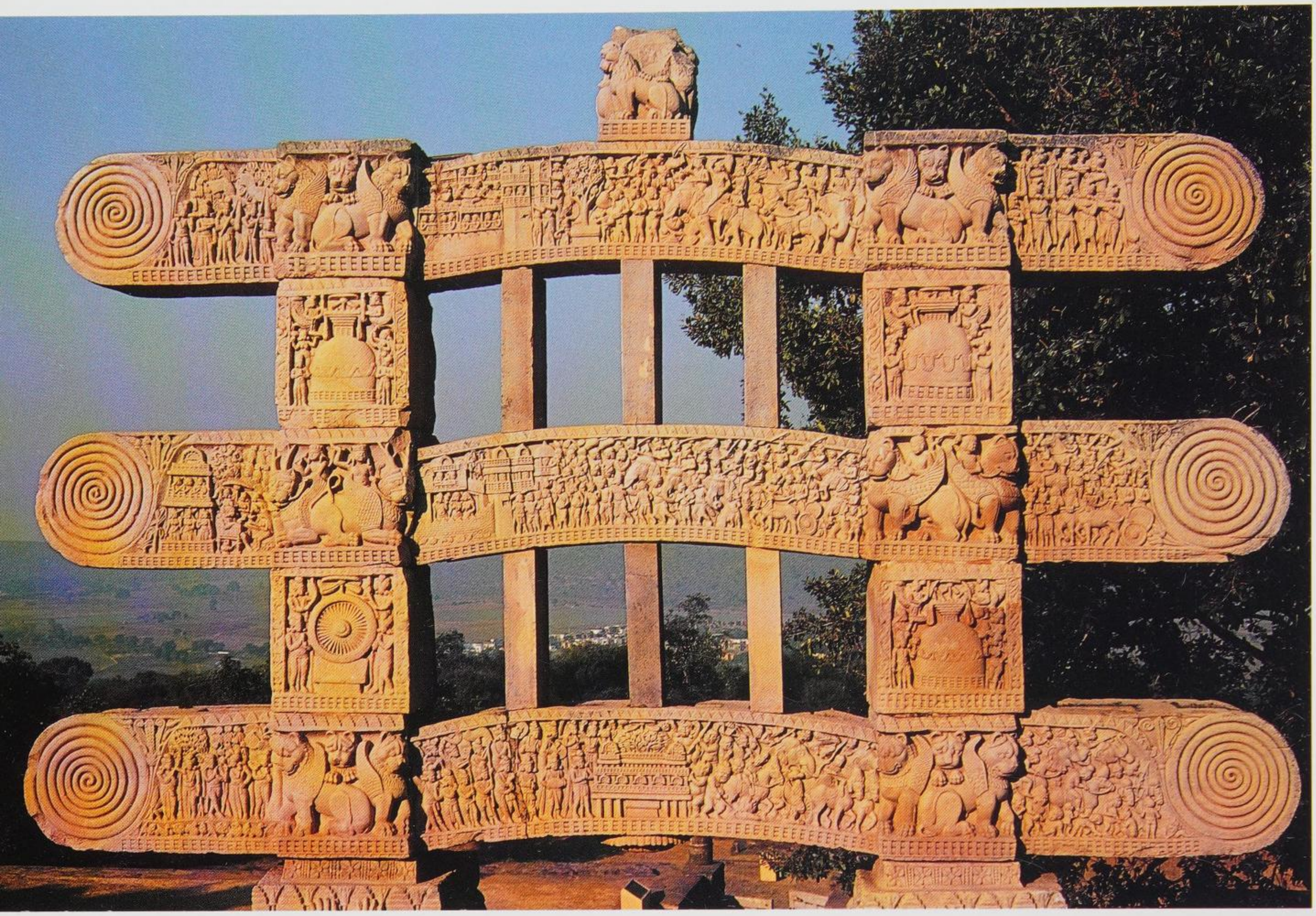
Page 62:
46. Ashoka and retinue
Detail of gatepost reliefs (south-gateway), sandstone, Great Stupa, Sanchi, Central India, Satavahana Period, 1st century BCE–2nd century CE.

47. War-elephants carrying *howdahs*
Basement sculptures, sandstone, Kandariya Mahadeva Temple, Khajuraho, Central India, Chandella Period, mid-11th century.

constituted a complete army, resulting in a modest total of 225 elephants—still impressive by any standards. By all accounts, a highly trained first division was indispensable to any army worth its name. From the enemy's point of view, it was also the most formidable. Interestingly, kings and generals seldom rode into battle on elephant-back, preferring instead the swifter and less temperamental horses and chariots.

The main function of the elephant-corps was to wreak complete havoc in the enemy lines—storming the first division of the opposition, breaking battlements and defences, knocking down chariots, upsetting horses and trampling infantrymen—especially during the opening moves of a campaign. In addition to their obligatory mahouts, each elephant generally carried a *howdah* large enough to accommodate two or four soldiers armed with bows and long spears (Fig. 47). Accompanying on foot, small deployments of infantry covered the animals and their riders from counter-attack. Accoutrements of warfare presented inventive regional specialities. The 16th-century Portuguese chronicler Fernao Nuniz observes that the war elephants of Vijayanagara 'on their tusks have knives fastened, much ground and sharpened, with which they do great harm.'[1] More familiar trappings were heavy leather armours that completely protected the animals from missiles and the attacks of other elephants (Fig. 48). The elephant's innate fear of fire was often exploited by the adversary to great advantage; it was not unusual for panic-stricken pachyderm warriors to throw off their riders and

48. Cavalry and armoured elephant
Basement frieze, schist, Keshava Temple, Somnathpur, Southern India, Hoysala Period, 1268.



49. War over the Buddha's relics (central architrave); transport of the relics (top architrave)
Inner faces of west-gateway architaves, sandstone, Stupa 1, Sanchi, Central India, Satavahana Period, 2nd century.

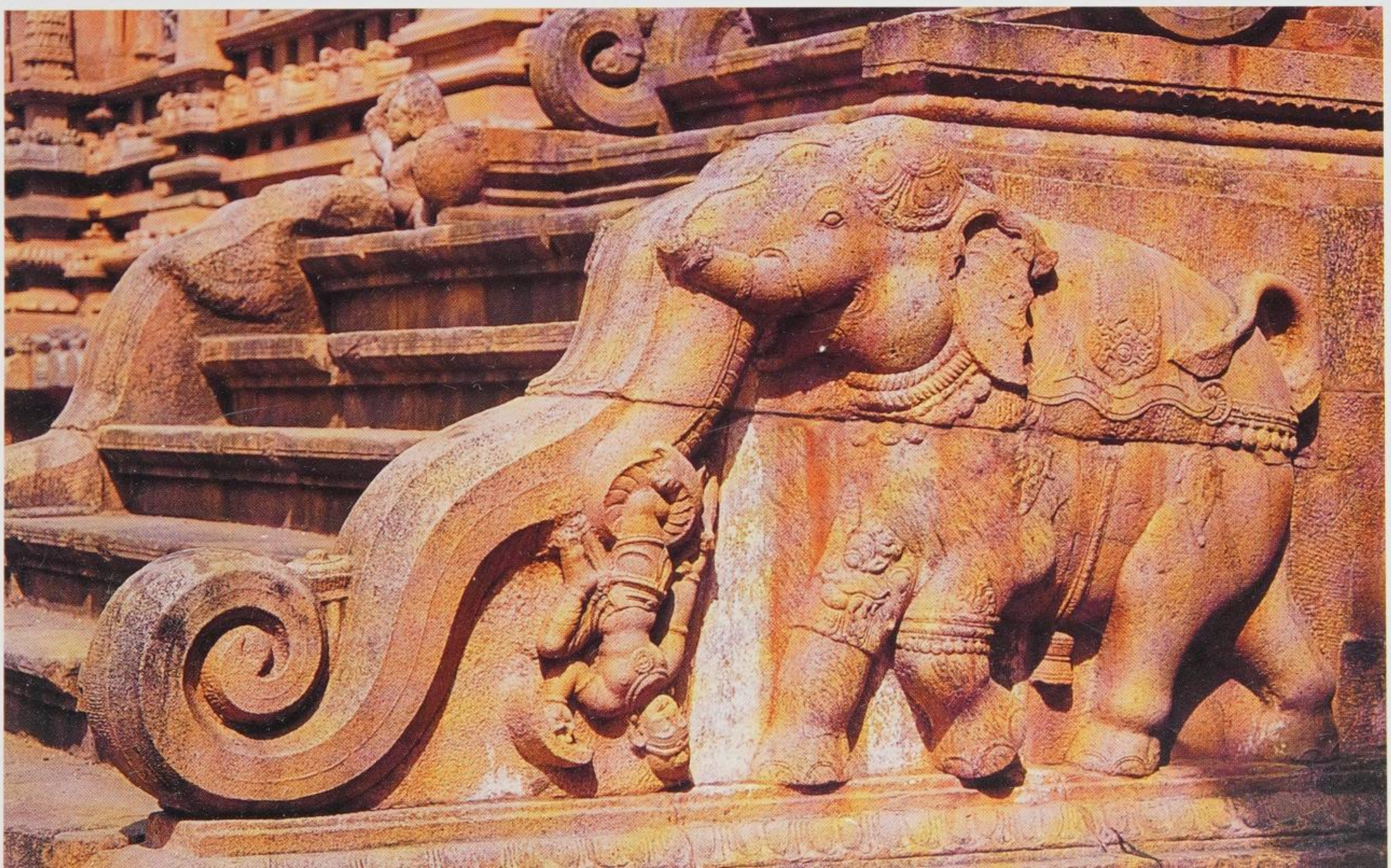
turn upon their own troops. But not all war elephants participated in active warfare: often, a separate contingent of *meerga* (deer-like) bulls and cows provided labour, moving artillery and drawing supply-wagons.

Some of the earliest depictions of war elephants in action appear in the gateway friezes of the Great Stupa of Sanchi, where the legendary battle over the Buddha's relics is a recurring subject of the relief carvings.

Historical accounts suggest that shortly before his death in Kushinagara (in modern-day Uttar Pradesh), the Buddha had expressed a desire that his ashes be divided amongst his followers and interred in reliquary pits that could be venerated for posterity. In contravention of these wishes, however, the Malla rulers, of Kushinagara, in whose dominion the Buddha's mortal remains had been cremated are believed to have retained the ashes for themselves. Distressed by the turn of events, the kings of seven neighbouring kingdoms, led by Ajathashatru of Magadha, besieged Kushinagara to claim their shares of the disputed ashes. The ashes were thereafter taken to Rajagrha, capital of Magadha, and impartially distributed in accordance with the Buddha's last wishes.

The four divisions of an ancient army can be clearly distinguished as events unfold in the rear faces of the Great Stupa's gateways. In the central architrave of the west-gateway, a platoon of elephants, chariots, cavalry and infantry is shown closing in on a fortified citadel that represents Kushinagara (Fig. 49). The battle gathers momentum in the lowermost architrave of the south-gateway. The citadel occupies the centre of the continuous-narrative frieze; the army advances from the right. On the left-hand side of the panel, a triumphant cavalcade escorts the Buddha's ashes out of Kushinagara. A large reliquary casket is transported on the head of the leading elephant. Back in the west-gateway, the uppermost architrave describes the arrival and distribution of the relics at Rajagrha (Fig. 49). As the episode nears conclusion, the figures before a *bodhi* tree are shown reverentially bearing smaller caskets of the shared relics.

Depictions of war in Hindu temple sculpture tend towards an enthusiasm that hardly diminishes even in the most violent scenes. Elaborately kitted to march into battle, orderly files of war elephants, horses and camels fill the *gaja-thara* of the Keshava Temple in Somnathpur (Fig. 48). At the Lakshmana Temple in Khajuraho, a member of the first division upends a soldier and makes to crush his head underfoot (Fig. 1). A similar idea is expressed in a splendidly curling balustrade at the Brihadishvara Temple Complex in Tanjavur, Southern India (Fig. 50). Another balustrade, at Chidambaram, shows a war elephant close on the heels of an equestrian warrior, who desperately urges his mount to a gallop—straight into the grinning jaws of a *makhara*. In the *gaja-thara*s of the Kandariya Mahadeva and the



50. Elephant and warrior
Balustrade, granite,
Subrahmanya Temple
(Brihadishvara Temple Complex),
Tanjavur, Southern India,
Nayaka Period, 17th century.

53. **Bhima killing Ashwatthama**
Basement frieze, schist,
Lakshminarayana Temple,
Hosaholalu, Southern India,
Hoysala Period, 13th century.

Charthurbhuja temples in Khajuraho, spirited war elephants zealously bear down on foot soldiers and cavalrymen.

Camels accompany war elephants and horses in the *gaja-thara* of the Samadhishvara Temple in Chitorgarh. In one detail, the elephant calmly plucks a soldier off the back of a camel (Fig. 51). Elsewhere, it upsets a cart drawn by oxen. In a marble bas-relief from Kota, a patently jubilant elephant trips up a distinctly miserable member of the camel-corps (Fig. 52). At Somnathpur, a war elephant diligently dismembers a dead soldier (Fig. 54). In Khajuraho, an animal capable of killing with one well-aimed swipe of its trunk, carefully retrieves its fallen rider.

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War elephants occasionally served more than their obvious functions and the use of one such animal as a pawn in battle is described in the *Mahabharata*.[2] The episode is significant enough to find mention in sacred art: two different interpretations are featured at a Chalukya temple at Dhambal in the Deccan and a Hoysala temple in Hosaholalu, Southern India (Fig. 53). The elephant in both carvings represents a royal mount named Ashwatthama. Its adversary is Bhima, the strongest of the five Pandava brothers. Their encounter is crucial to the outcome of the 18-day-long Kurukshetra war between the Pandavas and their cousins the Kauravas around which the marathon epic is woven.

During the war, Dronacharya, the commander of the Kaurava army, comes from training both clans in the art of warfare. With the teacher on their side, the Kauravas make steady progress; the Pandavas hatch a plot to crush the enemy-commander's spirit. Dronacharya has a son who shares his name with a war elephant. Ashwatthama the son and Ashwatthama the elephant are both present

Facing page:
Above:
51. Elephant attacking camel-rider
Basement frieze, sandstone,
Samadhishvara Temple,
Chitorgarh, Western India,
Solanki Period,
11th–15th centuries.

Below:
52. Elephant tripping camel
Detail of bas-relief, marble,
Badah Mahal (City Palace),
Kota, Western India,
Hada Chauhan Rajput Period,
17th century.

on the battlefield—the former fighting by his father's side; the latter bearing Indravarma, King of Malwa, in the Pandava army. Dronacharya's fondness for his son is legendary and the Pandavas decide to turn this attachment—and concurrence in names—to their advantage. The task of killing the elephant is assigned to Bhima. As the elephant falls, the Pandava army loudly proclaims that Ashwatthama is dead. Dronacharya refuses to believe what he has heard; but his son is nowhere to be seen. It now falls upon Yudhisthtira, eldest of the Pandava brothers, to personally convey the news; his reputation for being an embodiment of honesty is meant to lend credibility to the deception. Yudhisthtira approaches his former teacher and informs him that Ashwatthama is indeed dead. But mortified at the half-truth he has uttered, he looks down and softly adds: 'Ashwatthama, the elephant.' His words, however, are drowned by battle cries and drums and Dronacharya hears only the first half. Heart-broken, he lays down his weapons and sits grieving. As he prays for the soul of the son he believes is dead, Dronacharya is decapitated by a Pandava ally whose father he had killed in the battle. It is only a matter of time before the Pandavas win the war.

Some royal elephants could be trained to execute other 'noble' services, beyond the call of strictly military duties. In a chapter devoted to punishments for transgressions, the *Arthashastra* states with studied detachment that 'one (desirous of

54. Elephant dismembering a soldier
Detail of basement frieze, schist, Keshava Temple, Somnathpur, Southern India, Hoysala Period, 1268.

being) killed by an enraged elephant shall give one *∂rona* of food, a jar of wine, flowers and unguents and a piece of cloth for wiping the tusks.'[3] Nuniz, in 16th-century Vijayanagara, notes that 'when the King so desires, he commands a man to be thrown to the elephants and they tear him to pieces.'[4] The practice clearly hails from lofty antecedents. In the Puranic tales of Vishnu, a demon-king named Hiranyakashipu subjects his virtuous son, Prahalada, to various torments—not least, torture by elephants—in a vain attempt to crush the child's faith in god.[5] A carved depiction of the torture scene, at the Lakshminarayana Temple in Hosaholalu, shows Prahalada lost in prayer even as two elephants buffet him with their trunks from both sides.

From the legends of Krishna, another tyrannical king, Kamsa of Mathura, sets a rogue bull elephant named Kuvalayapida to kill the young hero and his brother Balarama. It is the elephant, however, that meets with a grim end.[6] The episode finds representation in sculpture at Osian in Western India (Fig. 55). In the panel, the lithe figure of Krishna is seen grappling with the elephant like a wrestler against a much heavier opponent; a party of onlookers cheers the god to victory.

When they were not engaged in military or punitive duties, royal elephants were constant fixtures at various recreational activities. The most popular, hunting tigers and other wild beasts, was a privilege originally reserved only for kings—another expression of their mastery over the animal world and an essential part of

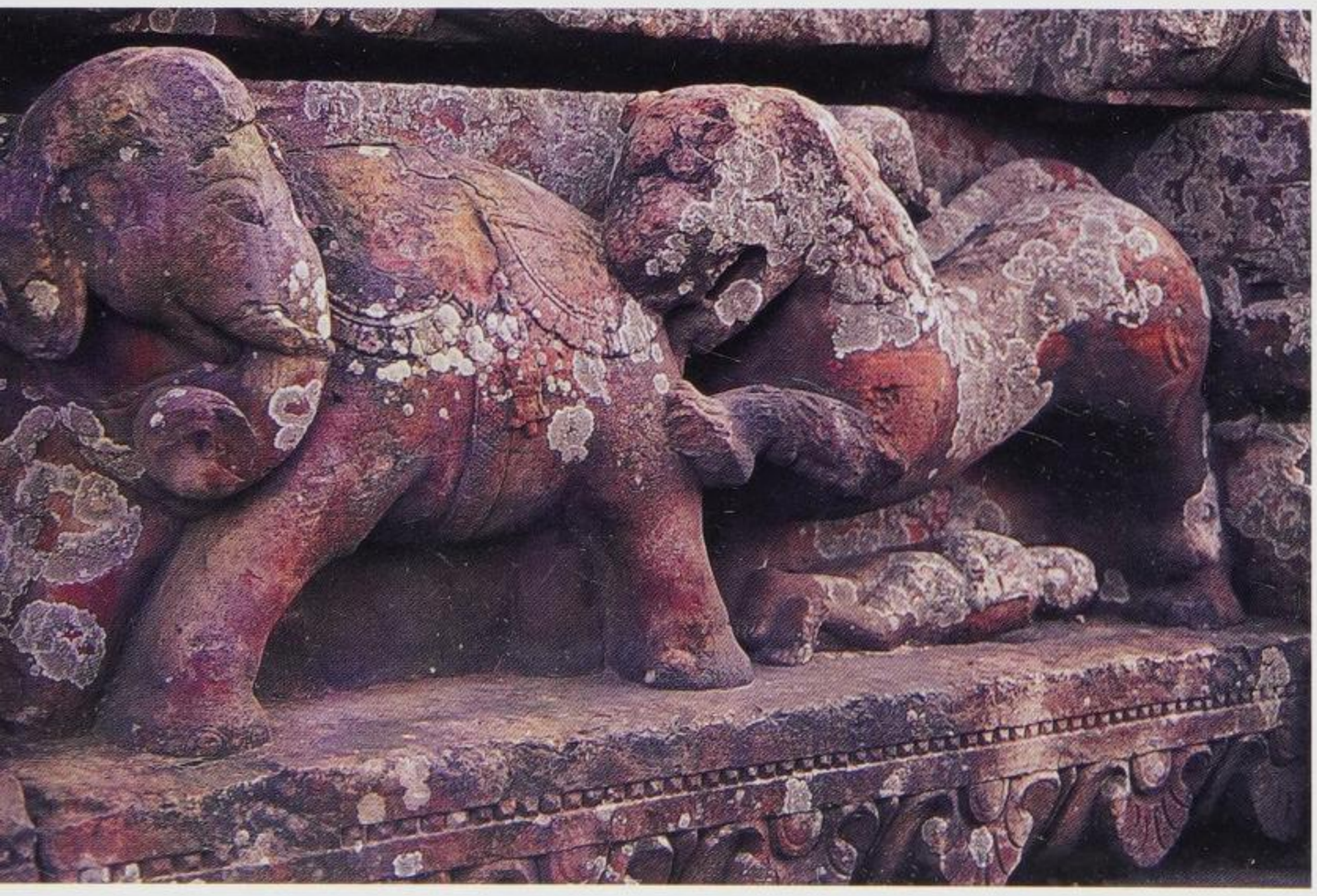
55. Krishna killing Kuvalayapida
Wall panel, sandstone,
Harihara Temple No 3, Osian,
Western India, Pratihara Period,
early 9th century.

royal military training during times of peace. In its earliest form, the sport mainly saw trained elephants ridden by mahouts being used to flush out the quarry for the king, on horseback, to come riding in and finish the job. The elephant's height and keen sense of smell, coupled with its ability to move silently and with surprising ease in different types of terrain, meant that the target—big cats in particular—once sighted, stood little chance of escape. That the king rode closer to ground level was a measure of his own fearlessness and equitation skills. Tigers, however, were notorious for launching fierce counter-attacks on hunting elephants. It was, therefore, essential that mahouts timed their moves with the greatest caution, lest their precious mounts came off badly, with mauled trunks and tails or ripped underbellies.

Just such a skirmish is the subject of a carved panel on the Mahanavami Platform in Vijayanagara. Accompanied by foot soldiers and a parasol-bearer, a regal equestrian figure has lanced a tiger, even as the victim savages a hunting elephant. The mahout sits well back on his mount, safely out of reach of claws and jaws; another huntsman on the ground quickly stabs the tiger to death. A tiger hunt is again the subject of another relief in the same monument. The reluctant elephant is goaded into charging the cat that sits crouched and snarling, ready to fight back (Fig. 44). Compared to these highly animated moments, scenes of a wild boar hunt in Khajuraho present a more languid air: carved almost entirely in the round, the boar root contentedly amidst the horses' and elephants' legs (Fig. 17).

Another favourite pastime encouraged by the rulers of many kingdoms during times of peace was the championship elephant-fight. These could find specially trained tuskers pitted against one another and their wild counterparts, as well as against other fierce creatures such as tigers, lions and bears, housed for the purpose in the royal menageries.

A fight involving two domesticated contestants is the subject of a set of small sculptural panels in the walls of the Dodda Basappa Temple in Dhambal. In one of the panels, the contestant is a wild elephant—distinguished by its lack of ornamentation—that has succumbed to the attentions of three lions (Fig. 57). Elephant-and-lion fights recur in the doorjamb carvings of numerous Central Indian temples. One of the most vivid depictions appears beside the sanctum doorway of the Gadarmal Temple in Badoh Pathari. The elephant has thrown off its mahout and flees from a larger than life feline adversary (Fig. 56).



56. Elephant, lion and fallen *mahout*
Basement sculptures, red sandstone, Gadarmal Temple, Badoh Pathari, Central India, Pratihara Period, 9th century.

57. Elephant and three lions
Wall panel, schist,
Dodda Basappa Temple,
Dhambal, Deccan,
late Chalukya Period,
12th century.

By the 15th century, the sheer popularity of the 'sport' meant that various rules had begun to lend some semblance of decorum to what was essentially a brutal spectacle, weakly justified as a way of keeping war elephants always prepared for action. In Western India (where exhibition-matches remained in vogue at many Princely States well into the 20th century), elephant-fights were generally conducted in a large open ground or palace courtyard, surrounded by spectators' galleries. A common practice was to starve the challengers for a day, prior to the big fight. A stiff draught of *arrack* (country liquor) just before the elephants entered the arena was believed to heighten their fighting spirit. A bout lasted no more than 10–15 minutes. With mahouts clinging firmly to their backs, the animals locked trunks and—amidst clouds of dust and a great clashing of tusks—pitched their might against one another until the weaker of the two sank to his knees, or at worst, turned and fled into the galleries. The scoring system varied from region to region. Generally, a small mound or pedestal at one end of the arena served as 'sanctuary'. When a trained contestant wished to withdraw, he simply placed his foot on the pedestal and, in doing so, automatically admitted defeat. Although fights seldom ended with one or both contestants dropping dead—elephants were far too precious to be squandered away in this manner—a low wall between the animals helped avert all-out carnage; occasionally, the wall was substituted with a wide ditch. As further precaution, the tusks of domesticated elephants were often sawn off halfway along the length and ferruled with ornamental silver caps to prevent them from inflicting fatal wounds.

Contests between domesticated elephants and wild tuskers were a rather different matter. Alien settings, baying crowds and a skilled opponent usually placed the novice at a disadvantage from the start. Neither pedestal nor wall was necessary when a trained elephant faced a different species of wild beast: mahouts generally ensured that their mounts emerged champions. Left to their own devices, untameable or ailing elephants might have been more expendable. If a fight went completely out of hand, it was invariably the mahouts and animal-handlers who suffered the greatest casualties.

The precise nature of an elephant fight is captured in telling detail in a marble bas-relief at the City Palace of Kota (Fig. 58). One of the challengers has tumbled over the separator wall. Its mahout jabs the adversary with an *ankush* (elephant-goad); a handler saws away at the fallen animal's foot chain. But it's probably too late: the victor in this fight has already gored the opponent's forehead. That the names of both contestants are inscribed beneath suggests that the animals may have been prized fighters of their time.

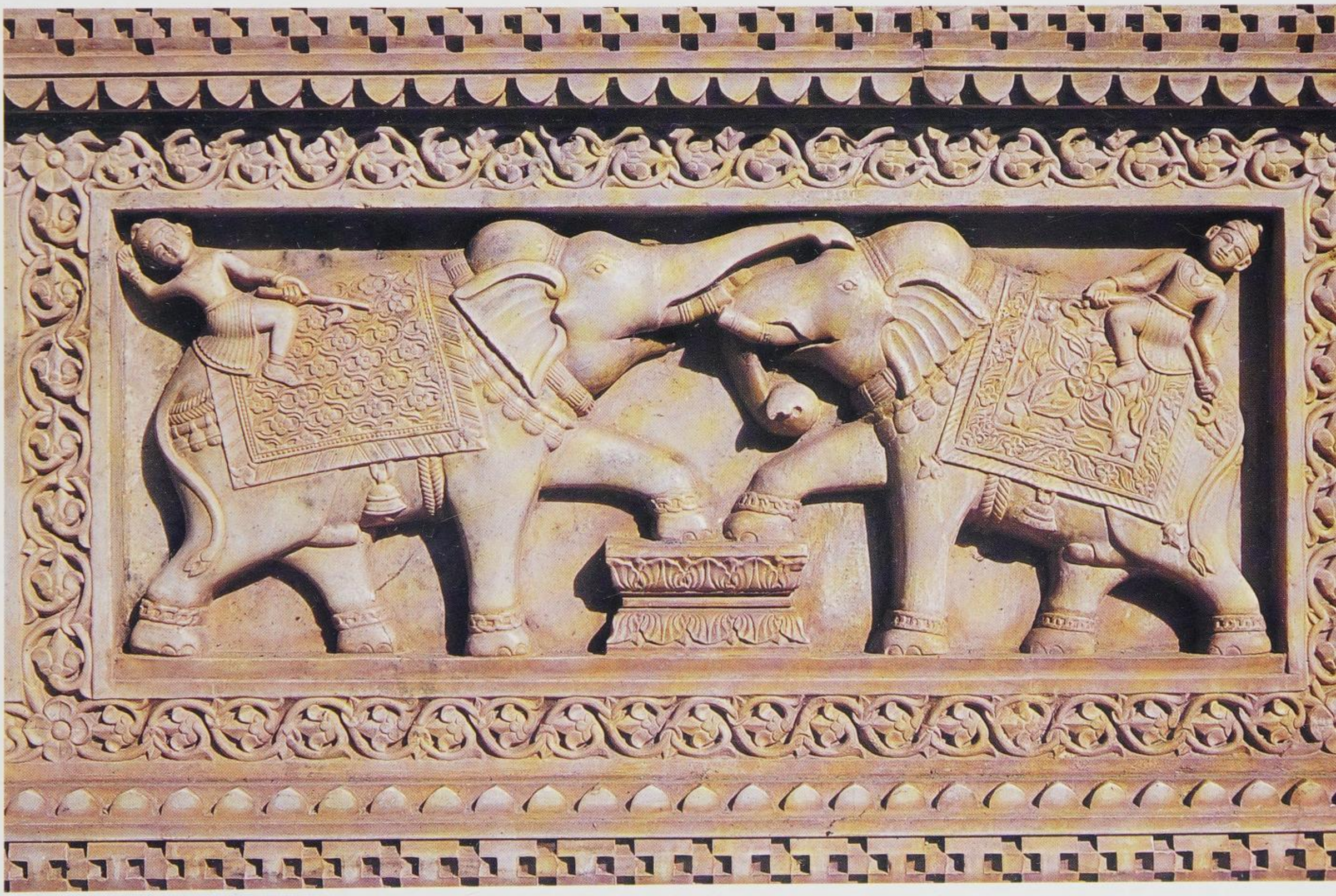
In the neighbouring kingdom of Bundi, tiger hunts and elephant fights figure prominently amidst scenes of courtly life and leisure in the sumptuous wall-

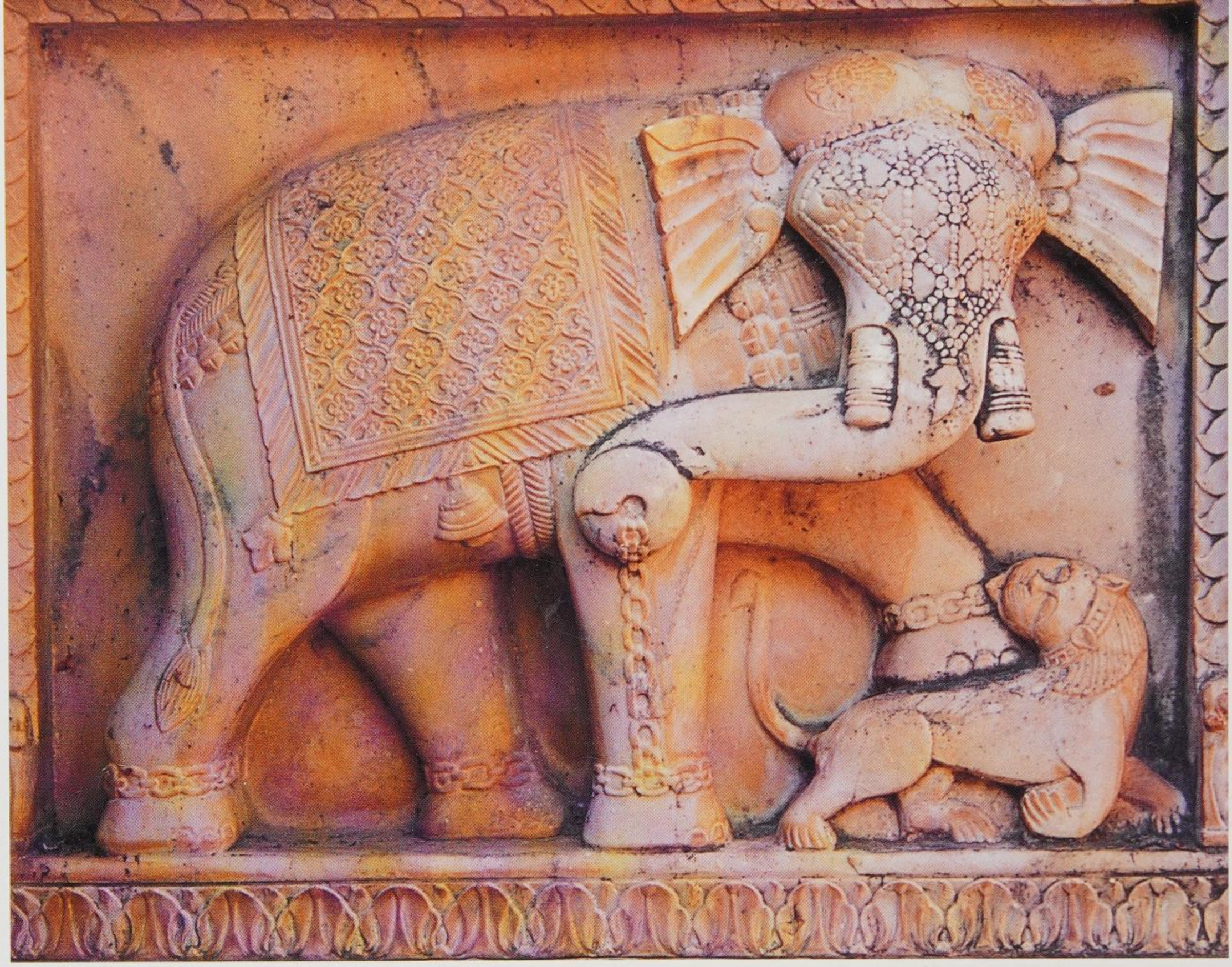
58. An elephant fight
Detail of bas-relief, marble,
Badah Mahal (City Palace),
Kota, Western India,
Hada Chauhan Rajput Period,
17th century.

paintings inside a rambling 17th-century palace. Curiously, the theme of elephant fights is the main decorative idiom in a large group of sandstone-and-marble cenotaphs of the Bundi kings. The marble bas-reliefs appear on two different levels in the basements of the structures. The elephants take on each other as well as tigers and lions (Fig. 59, 60). Sanctuary pedestals and separator walls are incorporated into the compositions as decorative details. In addition to these panels, the basement of each cenotaph is decorated with larger, fully modelled sculptures of sparring elephants and relief carvings of rider-less horses, the latter symbolic of mourning a departed ruler. From first to last, the carved details present a veritable catalogue of finery—brocaded saddlecloths, beaded and chain-mail face-guards, belled collars and ankle chains, jewelled harnesses and ferruled tusks—more suited, it would seem, for a ceremonial pageant.

Royal elephants, after all, were known to be at their sartorial best when it came to courtly celebrations and festivities. The parsimonious voice of the*Arthashastra* suggests that 'the *vyjayanthi* necklace, the *kaurapra* necklace, the covering, the carpet and so on are the ornaments'[7] suitable for use on an elephant (Fig. 61). By the middle ages, however, most royal owners were lavishing small

59. Sparring elephant
Basement of royal cenotaph,
marble, Kshar Bhag,
Bundi, Western India,
Hada Chauhan Rajput Period,
17th–18th centuries.





60. Elephant and lion
Basement of royal cenotaph, marble, Kshar Bhag, Bundi, Western India, Hada Chauhan Rajput Period, 17th–18th centuries.

fortunes on extravagant ceremonial attire for their animals, which in turn served as dazzling reminders of their own affluence. A marvellously evocative account, penned c 1520–22, of the annual 10-day long Mahanavami festival at Vijayanagara comes from Domingo Paes, Portuguese visitor at the court of Krishnadevaraya. Among the troops and cavalry paraded before the king on the last day of festivities is a battalion of war elephants 'covered with caparison of (Mecca) velvet and gold, with fringes and rich cloths of many colours, and bells so that the earth resounds; and on their heads are painted faces of giants and other kinds of great beasts. On the back of each one of them are three or four men, dressed in their quilted tunics and armed with shields and javelins, and they are arrayed as if for a foray.'[8] The grandeur of one such Mahanavami procession is recorded in sculpture at the Ramachandra Temple in Vijayanagara, where formal lines of elephants, horses, infantry and courtesans cover the outer faces of the temple's enclosure wall (Fig. 62). The inner faces of the wall carry individual narrative panels that illustrate various episodes from the *Ramayana*. One of the panels shows Rama and his wife, Sita, his brother, Laksmana, and his wife, Urmila, riding together on an elephant. A royal wedding procession is the subject of another panel. The vehicle here is a chariot drawn by elephants.

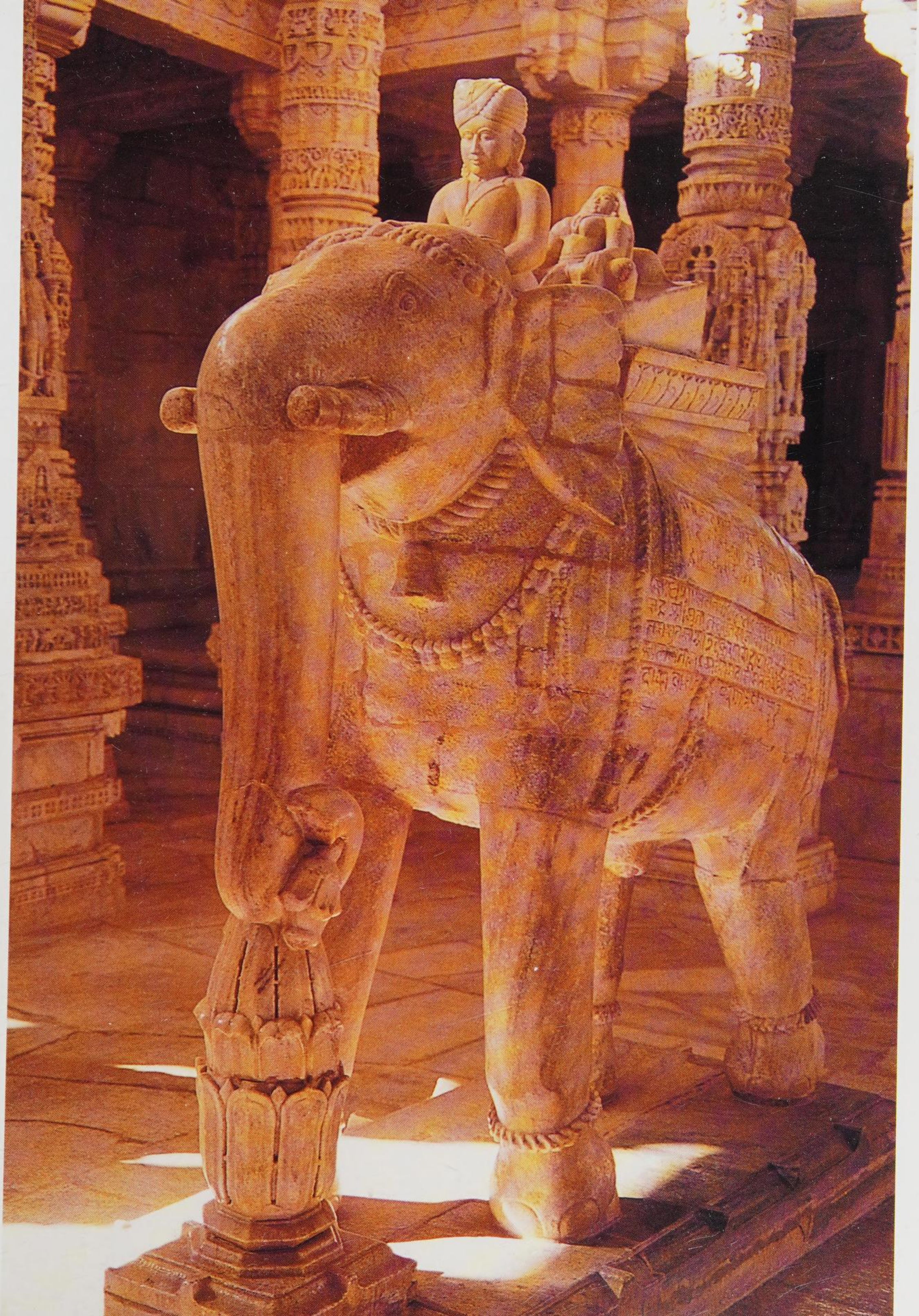
Facing page:
61. Ornaments and saddlecloth
Detail of sculpture, sandstone, Adinatha Temple, Khajuraho, Central India, Chandella Period, late 11th century.

Facing page:
63. Processional elephant
Freestanding sculpture, marble, Adinatha Temple, Ranakpur, Western India, Sisodia Rajput Period, 1439.

Of the many elephants owned by a king, one particular animal—always a handsome *koomeria* bull with long and perfectly formed tusks—had the unparalleled honour of being consecrated as the ruler's personal mount. Known as 'state-elephant', the animal chosen for the role was held especially sacred and was afforded the utmost care and reverence by its owner, mahout and handlers. Pampering could take various forms: a carved panel from Lakkundi, for instance, shows a bejewelled royal mount serenaded by an orchestra of flutes, cymbals, a violin and a lute. In Vijayanagara, the royal elephant stable is a palatial range of eleven spacious domed halls, complete with a pavilion for musicians above.

Borrowing from the same imagery that distinguished the king of gods, a popular device in figural art was to portray monarchs on their personal elephants and in situations befitting their noble calling and status. In the west-gateway of the Great Stupa, Ajathashatru, the king of Magadha supervises the distribution of the Buddha's relics from the back of his royal elephant (Fig. 47). The king is again depicted on elephant-back in a processional scene in the north-gateway; a finely worked, horse-drawn chariot rolls by in the foreground. In another gatepost relief, the beatifically smiling personage on the principal elephant represents the great Maurya emperor Ashoka—Buddhism's most influential convert and to

62. Mahanavami processions
Wall friezes, granite, Ramachandra Temple, Vijayanagara, Deccan, Vijayanagara Period, 15th century.



whose patronage many of the earliest monuments of the faith owe their existence (Fig. 46). At the Adinatha Temple in Ranakpur, two fully modelled marble elephants are shown bearing queen Maru Devi, mother of the first Jain Tirthankara, Adinatha, in procession. The inscriptions on the saddlecloths identify the donors of the sculptures. The elephants have their trunks wrapped around sprouting *keval-vrikshas* (Fig. 63).

Because the largest and most important temples in any kingdom were inevitably built under imperial sanction and munificence, it was not unusual for royal patrons to commemorate themselves through portrait sculptures, strategically positioned amidst gods and goddesses in the edifices they had commissioned. Many of these portrait sculptures provide tantalizing insights into a bygone lifestyle. A particularly edifying example is preserved at the Sun Temple of Konark (Fig. 64). Set into the southern face of the high basement, the panel shows the Eastern Ganga King Narasimhadeva I proceeding on elephant-back to greet a party of foreign visitors who come bearing news and exotic gifts from faraway lands. Every element in the composition—from the peacocks roosting in a luxuriantly flowering tree to the tiny *ankush* in the mahout's hand—is described in loving detail that time has only slightly blurred. The king's guests appear to be Persian from the cut of their robes. Among the delights borne by them across two oceans to the East Coast of India is a full-grown giraffe.

Facing page:
64. Narasimhadeva I receiving visitors
Basement panel, khondalite, Sun Temple, Konark, Orissa, Eastern Ganga Period, 13th century.

Sentinel and Cipher

Thus, O King, having reached a hundred and twenty years,
and having performed many kinds of work, the elephant goes to heaven.

—Matangalila

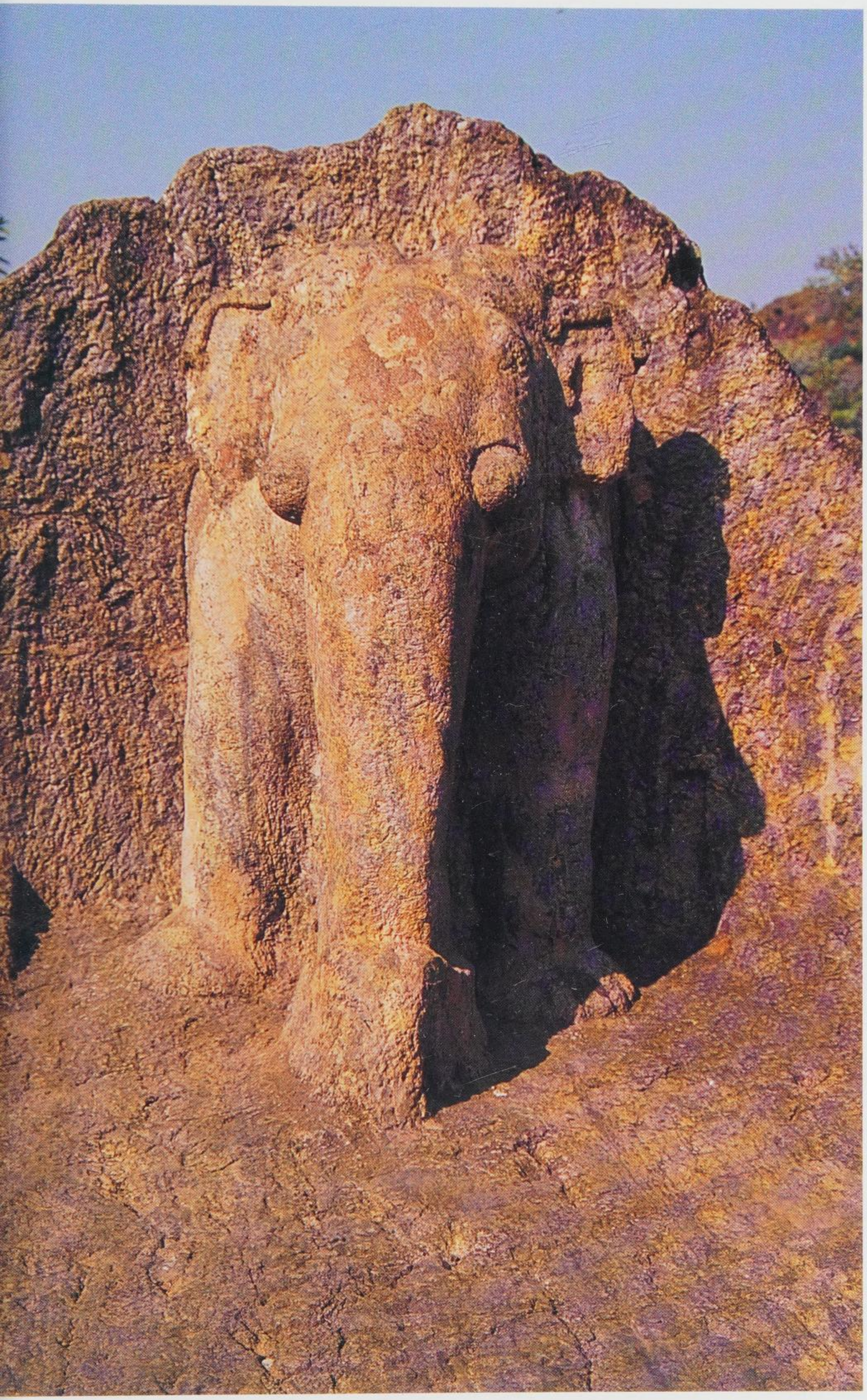
References to animal motifs in a purely emblematic context abound in the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* and in the various Puranas. With their classic symbolisms of victory, courage, nobility and strength, lions, elephants, horses and bulls are particular favourites in the banners and ensigns of various divinities and mythical heroes. The same animals reappear as splendid imperial totems—for the first time in stone sculpture—during the 3rd century BCE, to adorn the rock- and pillar-edicts of the Maurya Emperor Ashoka.[1] The oldest of these sculptured animals (carved c 257 BCE) to have survived in its original setting is probably the elephant crowning a sandstone outcrop in Dhauli, Orissa (Fig. 66). About 3 feet high, the stumpy likeness is rendered as though the animal has stepped straight out of the living rock. Inscribed in Brahmi script on the rock face beneath is Ashoka's famous Kalinga Edict, which commences thus:

> Beloved-of-the-Gods[2] says that the Mahamattras of Tosali[3] who are judicial officers in the city are to be told this: I wish to see that everything I consider to be proper is carried out in the right way. And I consider instructing you to be the best way of accomplishing this. I have placed you over many thousands of people so that you may win the people's affection.[4]

The Kalinga War—fought in 261 BCE, on the vast plains surrounding Dhauli—goes down in history as the most successful, and the bloodiest, of Ashoka's legendary empire-building campaigns. In the years following the war, however, the great Maurya is believed to have undergone a gradual transformation in personal ideology—turning increasingly to the Buddha's *Dhamma* (Law of Piety), for guidance in all aspects of living before formally converting to Buddhism around 258 BCE. His edicts, therefore, represent only part of a grander commitment towards establishing a new ethos in governance, largely based on Buddhist ideals of tolerance, compassion and non-violence. One of the earliest physical manifestations of this initiative was positioned at a site by such immediate, and painful, memories of the war. It is not surprising, therefore, that the sentiments expressed in the edict should be endorsed, as it were, the image of an elephant: by the 3rd century BCE, the animal was revered as a symbol not only of the Buddha but also of royalty—its associations with human ideals of piety and benevolence were already established in Buddhist mythology. Although the Dhauli edict has no obvious architectural connotations, it is perhaps with this particular image that the elephant embarks on its long career in art and architecture as an auspicious 'guardian' of sacred and royal settings.

Two early interpretations of the role appear diametrically across the subcontinent from Dhauli, at two early-Buddhist sites in the Deccan. In Ajanta, the rock-cut doorway of a 1st-century BCE cave-temple is flanked by a pair of

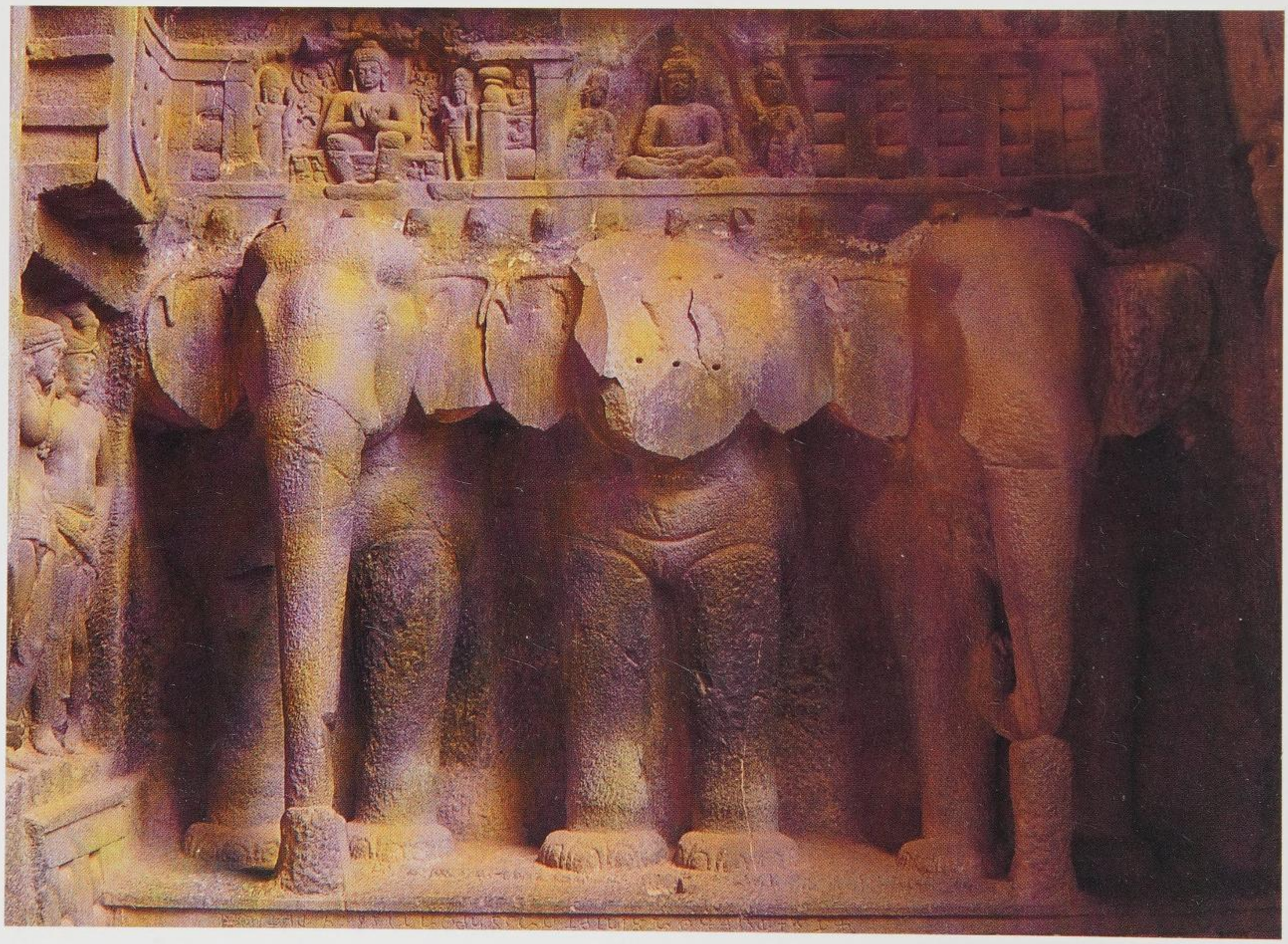
Page 82:
65. Guardian elephant
Rock-cut relief, basalt,
Entrance to Cave 15A, Ajanta,
Deccan, Satavahana Period,
1st century BCE.



66. Elephant
Rock-cut sculpture, sandstone,
Kalinga Edict, Dhauli, Orissa,
Maurya Period, c 257 BCE.

life-size elephants, powerfully modelled in high relief from the living rock face. The absence of ornamentation enhances the forbidding appearance of the animals as they deter unwelcome forces from gaining entry (Fig. 65). At Karli, in contrast, a more cordial reception committee graces the interiors of a stunning rock-cut *chaitya* (Buddhist chapel) of the 1st century CE. Ascribed to the Kshatrapa Period, the chapel owes much to royal patronage: a richly decorated entrance-screen in the antechamber is adorned with realistic portrait-carvings of various donor couples. At right angles to the screen, the lateral walls of the antechamber are deeply sculpted with triads of life-size elephants, standing shoulder to shoulder with ears fanned (Fig. 67). Most of the figures are severely damaged; socket holes alongside the trunks of the survivors indicate that they may have originally carried real ivory tusks. The rock-faces above the elephants are covered with relief carvings. These include figures of seated Buddhas and tiered architectural motifs.

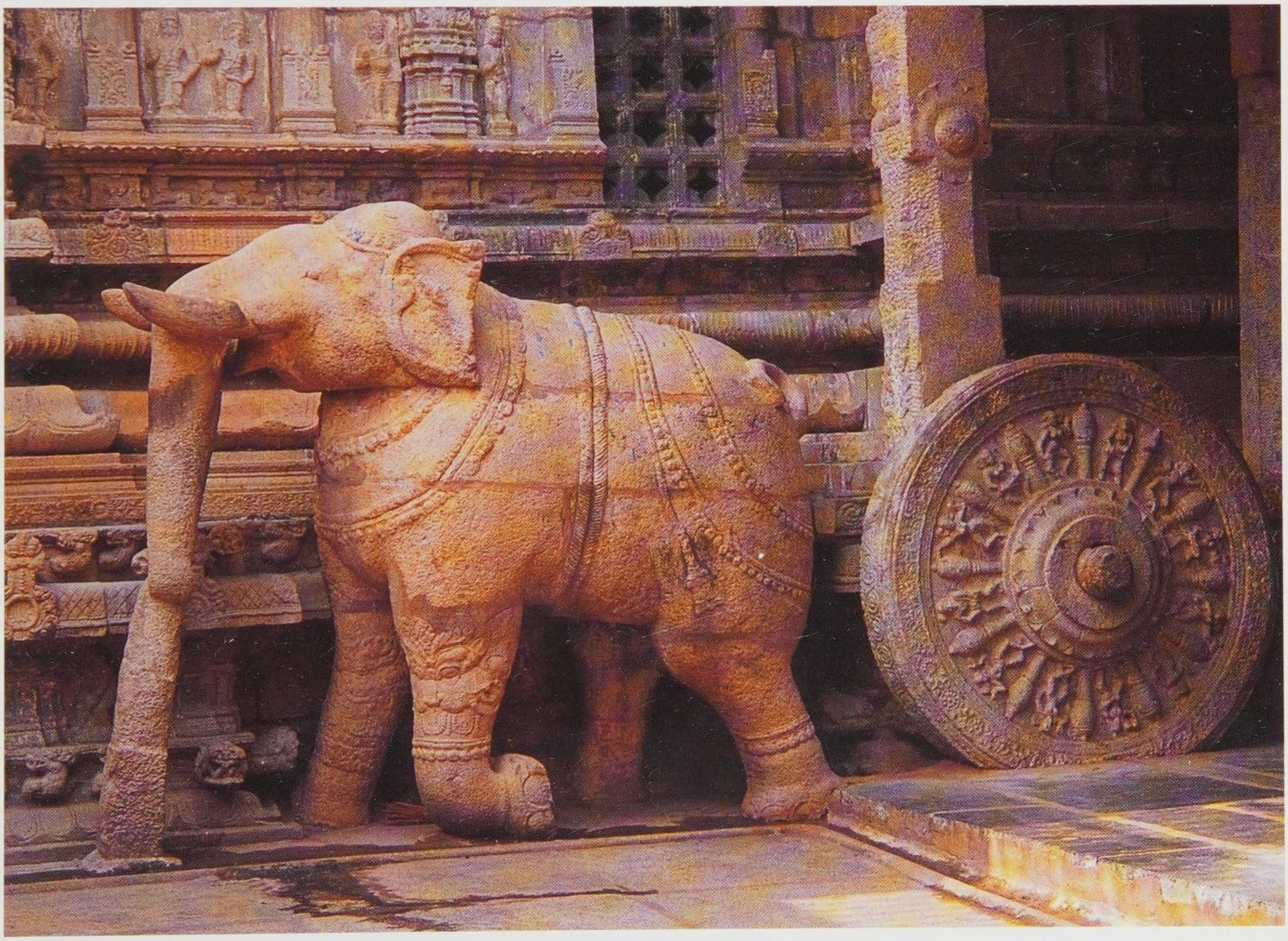
The nave of the *chaitya*—124 feet long, 46 feet wide and 45 feet high—is accessed through any of the three doorways in the entrance-screen. Ranged along the length of the hall is an impressive colonnade of 30 rock-cut piers, each crowned with a large figural capital carved as a pair of crouching elephants.



67. Guardian elephants and Buddhas
Rock-cut wall sculptures, basalt, Cave 8, Karli, Deccan, Kshatrapa Period, 1st century.

The animals are seated back to back and carry embracing courtly couples who gaze down with serenely smiling expressions. Viewed from an angle, the rhythmic groupings of animals and riders appear as composite sculptural friezes leading the eye towards a monolithic votive stupa—complete with its original wooden parasol—at the far, apsidal end of the chapel.

Early-Buddhist inspirations repeatedly find expression in the depiction of guardian-elephants in both Jain and Hindu architectural sculpture. Placed at the entrance of the Ganesh Gumpha Cave-Temple in Udayagiri, Orissa, a pair of monolithic elephants carry bunches of mangoes as offerings to the deity whose abode they protect. Another Jain temple, at Pattadakal in the Deccan, presents the foreparts of two elephants, standing stiffly at attention on either side of the sanctuary door. The animals are shown slightly smaller than life-size and enriched with elegant bead necklaces; they also bear a slight resemblance to the older mock-caryatids at the Kailashanatha Temple in Ellora. Smaller but more ornate guardians grace the entrance stairway of the Mallikarjuna Temple in Basaralu. The most unusual interpretation is to be found at the Sarangapani Temple in Kumbakonam, Southern India. At the heart of the temple complex, two life-size



68. Elephant and chariot wheel
Basement sculptures, granite,
Sarangapani Temple,
Kumbakonam, Southern India,
late Chola Period, 13th century.

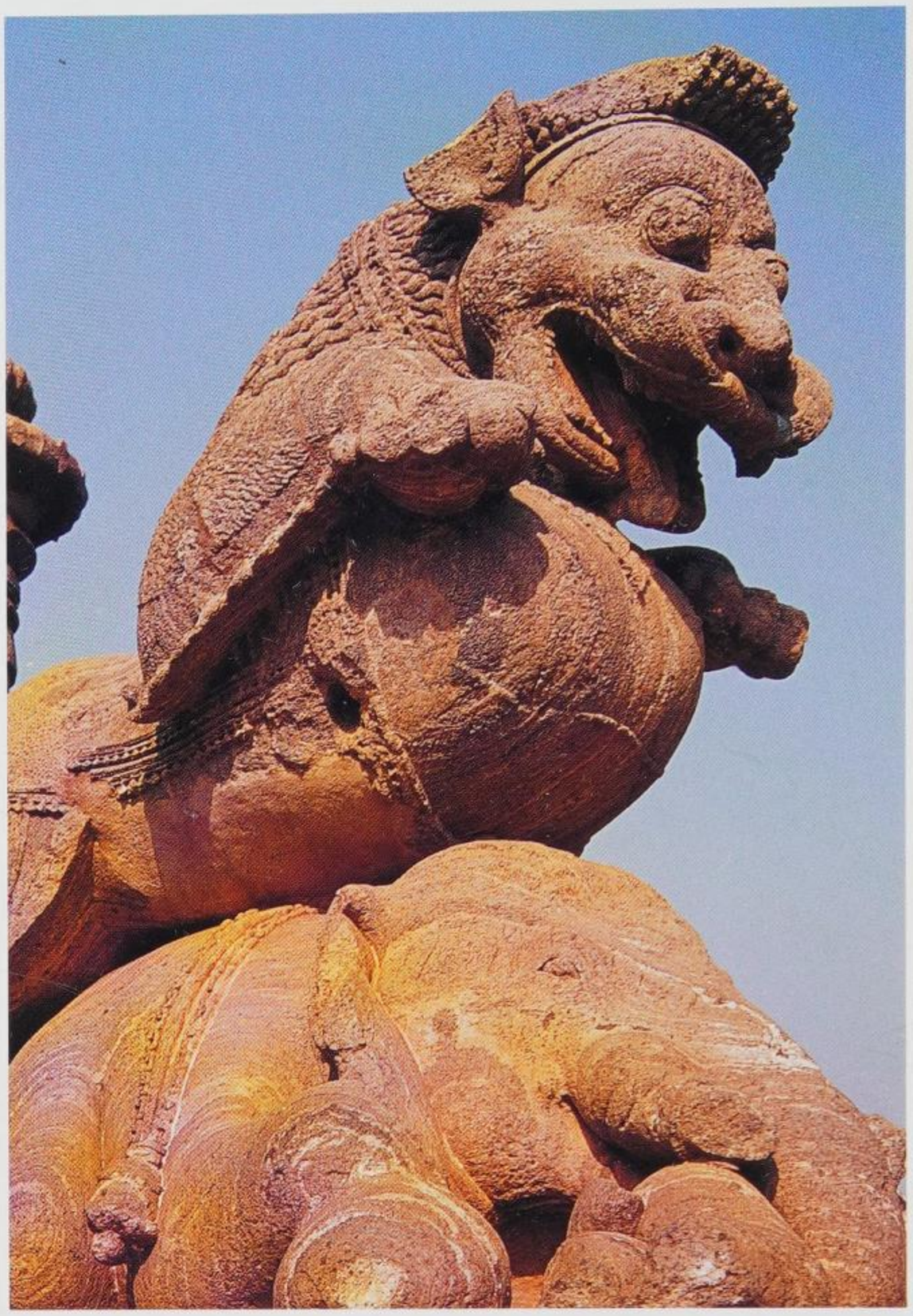
69. ***Gaja-kranthasimhas***
Detail of pilaster, sandstone,
Vaital Deul Temple,
Bhubaneswar, Orissa,
Bhauma Kara Period,
late 8th century.

elephants are shown striding proudly forward as they perform the dual function of protecting as well as 'drawing' the main shrine that is conceived as a chariot (Fig. 68).

Of the myriad symbolic motifs that flourish in sacred art, one distinctive genre hallmarks a collection of Hindu temples dating from the 8th–13th centuries in Orissa. Known as the *gaja-kranthasimha* (elephant-conquering lion), the motif expresses a strangely disquieting theme of fierce lions[5] subjugating smaller, meekly crouching elephants. The imagery is metaphoric and probably derives from a Puranic description[6] of the flag of Surya, the Sun God, emblazoned with the figure of a lion leaping over a crescent moon—an obvious allegory of sunrise, and by extension, victory. Designed to convey the same meaning, the Orissan interpretation of the motif substitutes a 'cloud elephant' for the moon.

Adapted as the royal insignia of a long succession of powerful Orissan dynasties, the lion-elephant motif serves as a link between 'guardian figure' and 'imperial totem', and recurs in a number of temples that were essentially built to commemorate successful military campaigns of various local kings. The majority of the temples are dedicated to Shiva.[7] The *gaja-kranthasimhas* come fully modelled or carved in relief and are usually restricted to flanking the principal entrance or *simha-dwara* (lion-gate) of a temple. They also appear as wall-panels and as projecting mouldings in the characteristic Orissan *deul* (sanctuary tower).

Facing page:
70. *Gaja-kranthasimhas* and guardian figures
Details of sanctuary tower,
sandstone, Parvati Temple,
Bhubaneswar, Orissa,
Eastern Ganga Period,
13th century.



Left:
71. *Gaja-kranthasimha* with warrior
Wall panel, sandstone,
Brahmeshvara Temple,
Bhubaneswar, Orissa,
Somavamshi Period, 1060.

Right:
72. Leaping *gaja-kranthasimhas* and elephant
Entrance sculpture, khondalite,
Natamandira of Sun Temple,
Konark, Orissa,
Eastern Ganga Period,
13th century.

The largest collection of triumphal temples—and consequently, of the most varied interpretations of the motif—is grouped around the sacred Bindu Sarovara Tank in Bhubaneswar. An early example is the 8th-century Vaital Deul Temple, whose profusely sculptured exteriors present a range of identical *gaja-kranthasimhas* in the pilaster mouldings (Fig. 69). The lions and elephants are described with almost obsessive detail; only the rigidly conventionalized stances inform their emblematic context. Moving on to the 10th-century Mukteshvara Temple, a set of miniature *gaja-kranthasimhas* in the detached *torana* gateway of the temple proper demonstrates an inventive solution to the decoration of corners: viewed head-on, the animals appear as double-bodied lions and elephants. The Indreshvara (also known as the Rajarani) Temple, on the other hand, has simple triads of lion-elephants in the jambs of the main doorway. At the Brahmeshvara, an especially spirited *gaja-kranthasimha* adorns the temple's east-facing wall. As it leaps over the elephant, the lion spews strings of jewels from its gaping mouth. The triumphant warrior on its back flails a flowering bough—a further allusion to dawn and new life (Fig. 71). At the Lingaraja, Bhubaneswar's tallest and most imposing temple, wildly contorting *gaja-kranthasimhas* are recessed into narrow

wall niches around the sanctuary. The elephants assume various submissive poses. A more restrained version projects from the *deul* of the Parvati Temple, imitating that in the *deul* of the Lingaraja towering alongside (Fig. 70).

Given the cosmological and magisterial connotations of the motif, it is hardly any wonder that the largest congregation of *gaja-kranthasimha*s flourishes in Orissa's architectural climax: Narasimhadeva I's gloriously baroque 'chariot' of the Sun, built expressly to commemorate his victories against the Early Muslim Sultanate of Bengal.[8] The sheer number in which the motif still crops up at all levels of the ruins is an indication of how many more must have originally adorned the edifice as omnipresent and far from subtle reminders of Eastern-Ganga supremacy. With flaming manes and wide-open jaws, the lions thrive in an assortment of sizes, poses and positions, often carrying exultant warriors on their backs. A large and vigorous example clings to a surviving section of the ruined *deul*; the crouching elephant bears a rider of its own. Smaller but no less animated *gaja-kranthasimha*s alternate with divinities and *gaja-vyala*s in the sides of the high basement. In one set of sculptures, the action involves more than the two main participants, some of whose heads have long vanished.

Predictably, Konark's largest and most arresting *gaja-kranthasimha*s are positioned at the entrance of the Sun Temple Complex, flanking the stairway of the temple's *natamandir* (dance hall). Each over nine feet tall, the fierce lions-of-dawn leap outwards over elephants that lie flattened beneath (Fig. 72). The tableaux also incorporate a direct, if somewhat macabre reference to victory in warfare: crushed in the trunk of each elephant is a fallen soldier.

73. Heraldic elephants
Sculptured brackets,
green serpentine,
Hathi-Shala of Garh Palace,
Bundi, Western India,
Hada Chauhan Rajput Period,
17th century.

74. Elephants
Pierced screens and pavilion, sandstone and glazed tile-work, Man Mandir Palace, Gwalior, Central India, Tomara Period, 15th century.

Facing page:
Above:
75. Heraldic elephants
Sculptured brackets, painted sandstone, *Hathi-pol* of City Palace, Kota, Western India, Hada Chauhan Rajput Period, 18th century.

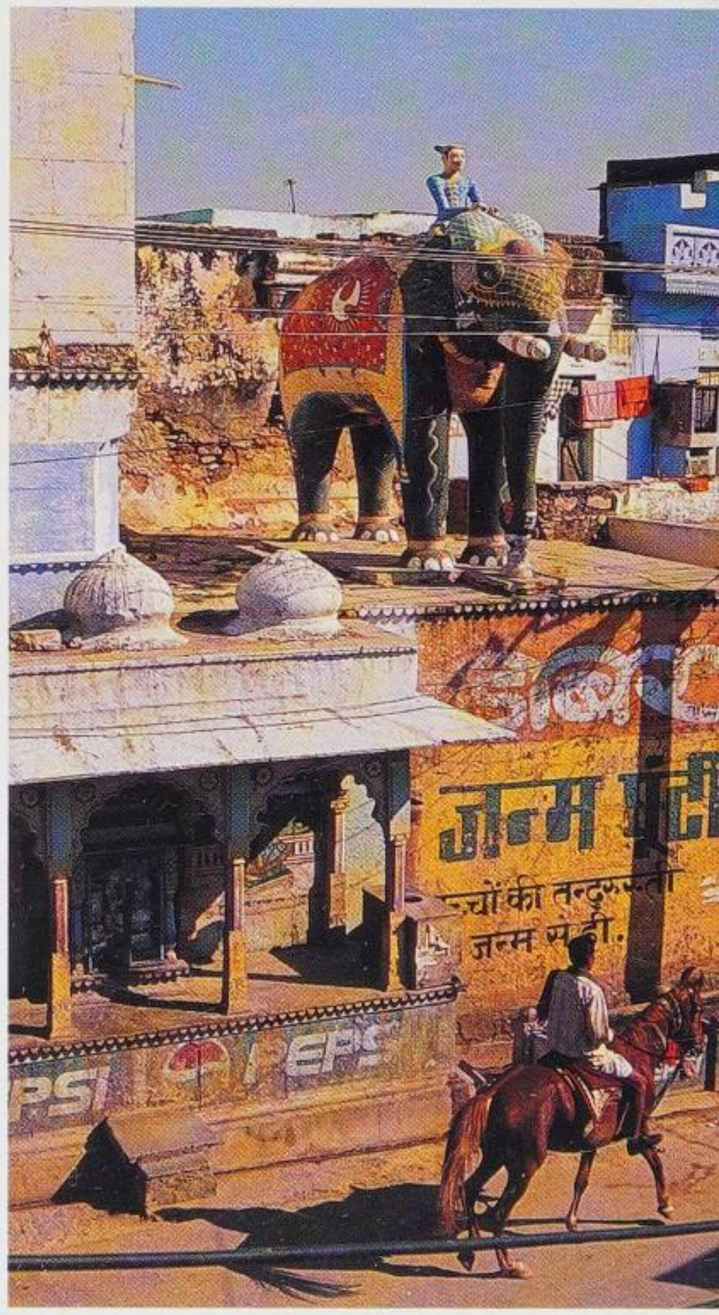
Below:
76. Shivprasad
Memorial sculpture, painted sandstone, Main Street, Bundi, Western India, Hada Chauhan Rajput Period, 17th century.

The arrival of the Mughals in the early 16th century ushers in a new aesthetic in Hindu architecture—largely developed in the Rajput kingdoms of Central and Western India. Inspired by early-Muslim models (already in place since the late 12th century) as well as Mughal innovations in structure and styling, the typical Rajput style demonstrates a fluent and often picturesque hybrid of Persian style and homegrown Hindu influences—perhaps best exemplified in the sprawling hilltop palace of Man Singh Tomar of Gwalior (Fig. 74). The oldest portions of the Man Mandir Complex in fact date from the late 15th century. A number of characteristic features in its sumptuous exteriors are echoed and elaborated elsewhere within: cusped 'Islamic' arches articulate entrances and fenestration and serve also as purely decorative details; polychromatic glazed tile-work enlivens miles of sandstone ramparts; pierced stone screens relieve the severity of heavy masonry; domed pavilions and projecting balconies make for romantic skylines. Sculptured ornamentation on the whole tends towards a stiff and formalized ideal. Typically, running-patterns of geometric and vegetal motifs are juxtaposed with stylized representations of divinities and 'regal' creatures, notably peacocks, tigers and elephants.

An important feature of almost all the Rajput palaces (again inspired by early-Muslim and Mughal examples) is the *hathi-pol* (elephant gate), named both

for its imposing scale—commodious enough for *howdah*-bearing royal mounts and retinues to pass through—and for the figures of the animals adorning it. As the principal entrance into the residential apartments of a palace, *hathi-pol*s were invariably rich in ornamentation and symbolism, serving as stunning preludes to the many-splendoured worlds contained within. While the basic, cusped-arch form of the doorways seldom changes, finer details express diverse inspirations. In Orchha, for instance, a temple-style *torana* embellished with birds, bells and flower buds announces the main entrance of the Jahangiri Mandir, a 17th-century palace of the Bhundelkhand Rajput ruler Bir Singh Deo, built expressly to impress the visiting Mughal Emperor Jahangir. Sculpted separately, the doorway-guardians stand in slender pavilions on either side. One of the elephants carries a lotus, and the other, a bell.

If the decorative idiom expressed in Orchha's *hathi-pol* remains ceremonial, that of Bundi's returns to a theme already familiar in the kingdom's artistic traditions (Fig. 77). Carried on narrow ledges high above the arched grand-entrance, two life-size tuskers in painted marble lean forward dangerously to lock tusks in combat. Inside the palace, a ceremonial hall known as the *Hathi-Shala* (Elephant Court) owes its name to the carved brackets of the columns. Arranged in groups of four on each column, the animals are shown hailing one another with



outstretched trunks (Fig. 73). A similar idea is expressed in the brilliantly colour-washed *hathi-pol* of the City Palace in Kota (Fig. 75).

Not all heraldic elephants in Rajput architecture are restricted to palace gateways. In Udaipur, a row of large marble elephants embedded into the outer ramparts of the City Palace simply leads the visitor towards the main entrance of the complex. Also in Udaipur, the Jag Mandir Island on Lake Pichola carries an idyllic 18th-century pleasure palace, the Gul Mahal. Overlooking the water from its eastern edge, a range of life-size marble elephants stand facing the City Palace on the lakeshore. The fully modelled animals have their trunks raised above their foreheads as if saluting the east. The metal sconces are modern; lit up at night and reflecting in the water, they complete the romantic imagery.

Few elephants in art are identified by name and fewer still, in reality, have memorials erected in their honour. A rare exception on both counts can be found in Bundi, where local history tells of a war elephant named Shivprasad. Gifted by the 17th-century Mughal Emperor Shahjahan to Rao Ratan Singh, the Hada Chauhan Rajput ruler of Bundi, the *koomeria* bull was trained to wield a sword in battle. When Shivprasad died of old age, the king's favourite elephant was cremated with full state honours followed by a period of mourning. His painted sandstone likeness—complete with turbaned mahout and brocade saddlecloth—keeps vigil over Bundi's narrow main street as it twists uphill towards the palace (Fig. 76).

Facing page:
77. Sparring elephants
Gateway sculptures,
painted marble,
Hathi-pol of Garh Palace,
Bundi, Western India,
Hada Chauhan Rajput Period,
17th century.

Notes

Heaven and Magic

1. *Rig Veda*, 2.4.4.
2. *Kshirabdhi-manthana* (Churning of the Ocean of Milk). Variations of the myth recur in the *Agni Purana*, *Vishnu Purana* and *Bhagavata Purana*, and in the epics *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*.
3. *Rig Veda*, 1.8.7.
4. *Bhagavata Purana*, Book VI, chapters 9–13.
5. The mango tree is significant. In a natural phenomenon that has remained largely unaltered for centuries, the onset of the monsoon in the subcontinent generally coincides with the last mango crops.
6. *Bhagavata Purana*, Book VIII, chapters 7–8.
7. *Brahmanda Purana*, Part 2, section 3, chapter 7, verses 314–324; *Mahabharatha*, *Adi Parva*, chapter 66.
8. ibid.
9. *Ramayana*, Book I, canto 40.
10. *Matangalila*, chapter 1, verses 11–13.
11. ibid, 'Introduction'.
12. Ten verses in the *Rig Veda* (7.103.1–10) are dedicated to frogs, alluding to the creatures as harbingers of rain.
13. *Jataka* No 514: *Chhaddanta Jataka*.
14. *Shiva Purana*.
15. *Padma Purana*.
16. *Bhagavata Purana*, Book VIII, chapters 2–4.

Life and Surrender

1. The figure is often identified as the Chedi King Kharavela, chief patron of the Jain *vihara*s and temples of Udayagiri and neighbouring Khandagiri.
2. *Ramayana*, Book I, cantos 42–44.
3. The *Brahmanda Purana* distinguishes the four elephant 'castes', based on physical attributes and temperament, as *bhadra* (noble), *meerga* (deer-like), *manda* (lethargic) and *samkirna* (intoxicated with rage). Of these, *bhadra* elephants were believed to possess the most desirable qualities for royal and military use. At the other end of the pachyderm caste-system, *meerga*s were characterised by a small head and narrow bones. Skittish and easily alarmed, these animals were considered difficult to handle, but made up in speed and strength what they were thought to lack in looks and temperament. As their names suggest, *mandha* and *samkirna* elephants were found largely unsuitable for training and work. The *Arthashastra* presents a different classification based solely on military usage: *dhamya* (tameable), *sannahya* (trained for warfare), *aupavaya* (trained for riding) and *vyala* (rogue). The term *koomeria* (pure or princely) has its roots in Bengal and refers to elephants of the *bhadra* type.
4. GP Sanderson, *Thirteen Years among the Wild Beasts of India*.
5. Elephant families are always led by a matriarch, usually the senior-most cow in the group. When a matriarch dies, one of her older daughters takes over the leadership. A typical family unit may consist of a dozen to over 20 members, including the matriarch's sisters, daughters, and their offspring. Juvenile males, who are originally part of this close-knit group, gradually move away from their mothers and siblings during adolescence to join autonomous bachelor-groups. Fully mature adult bulls are more solitary and approach family-units only to mate. Mating is not restricted to any specific season and can occur when receptive cows in oestrus accept the attentions of adult bulls in musth. Their business done, bulls return to their solitary ways or to the bachelor-groups. After a gestation period of 22 months (23 in the African species), a single calf is born; twins are rare. Baby elephants are highly vulnerable to predators. If threatened, the entire family ranks itself into a formidable cordon around their young. In the Asiatic species, only male elephants carry tusks. Over the last hundred years, hunting and poaching have resulted in high casualties among bull elephants. Despite protection and a ban on the ivory trade, mature males with large tusks are an increasingly rare sight in the Indian jungles. Today, the species faces the greater threat of habitat loss.
6. KC Panigrahi, *History of Orissa*.
7. It is virtually impossible to ascertain when the practice of capturing and training elephants first became established in India. Archaeological evidence—notably the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic cave paintings of Bhimbetka, near Bhopal in Madhya Pradesh—suggests that elephants may have been domesticated by prehistoric societies as early as 10,000 to 12,000 years ago. By the 2nd millennium BCE, elephants figure in everyday life and religion, as demonstrated in the steatite seals of the Indus Civilization in Harappa and Mohenjo Daro.
8. Lassoing and drop-pen techniques in combination were refined during the late 19th century into the *kheddah* (literally 'stockade') method. The technique was made famous by its pioneer, GP Sanderson, a British civil servant attached to the native Royal Court of Mysore, South India. It was practiced mainly in the Mysore jungles up until the 1970s.
9. *Kautilya Arthashastra*, chapter 2.31.8.
10. Ibn Khurdabaih's *Kitab al-Masaalikwal-Mamaalik* (846 CE) and Ibn Rusta's *Kitab al-A'laq al-Nafisa* (920 CE) were written to provide travellers, mainly traders, with basic information on the geography, climatic conditions, history, lifestyles and economics of various countries.
11. A carved architectural fragment, ascribed to the 9th–10th century Bhauma Kara Period, now displayed in the Orissa State Museum, Bhubaneswar, shows two barges transporting elephants and their mahouts across a choppy sea.

12. Musth is a condition in adult male elephants. Typical signs are a swelling of the temples and forehead, and the secretion of an acrid-smelling fluid from the temporal lobes. Male elephants 'in musth' can be extremely aggressive. Some female elephants have been known to experience musth, but without exhibiting marked changes in temperament or behaviour. Musth cannot be controlled with medication. In domesticated elephants, it is usually dealt with through the time-honoured method of tethering the animal to a strong post or tree and controlling its diet. It may take weeks or even months before the condition passes.
13. *Matangalila*, Chapter 12, verse 2.
14. *Kautilya Arthashastra*, chapter 2.32.8.
15. ibid, chapter 2.33.19.

Pomp and Circumstance

1. Robert Sewell, *A Forgotten Empire: Chronicle of Fernao Nuniz.*
2. *Mahabharata*, Book 9, chapter 5, verses 31–40.
3. *Kautilya Arthashastra*, chapter 4.13.15.
4. Robert Sewell, *A Forgotten Empire: Chronicle of Fernao Nuniz.*
5. *Bhagavata Purana*, Book VII, chapter 5.
6. ibid, Book X, chapter 43.
7. *Kautilya Arthashastra*, chapter 2.32.14.
8. Robert Sewell, *A Forgotten Empire: Chronicle of Domingos Paes.*

Sentinel and Cipher

1. Ashoka's edicts, which date from c 257–232 BCE, were inscribed on natural rock-faces and on stone and metal columns, and positioned in all parts of the Maurya Empire. A total of 40 Major and Minor Rock Edicts, Major and Minor Pillar Edicts and Cave Inscriptions have been discovered at various sites within the boundaries of modern India (34 edicts), and in Nepal (2 edicts), Pakistan (2 edicts) and Afghanistan (2 edicts). The Rock Edicts predate the Cave Inscriptions and Pillar Edicts. The inscriptions in India and Nepal are all composed in different dialects of ancient Prakit and inscribed in Brahmi script. Those discovered in Pakistan appear in Kharoshthi. The edicts in Afghanistan are bilingual: Greek and Aramaic.
2. In the opening stanzas of each edict, Ashoka refers to himself as Devanampiya Piyadassi (Beloved of the Gods; He who gazes with affection).
3. The term 'Mahamattras' refers to the administrators of Tosali, a metropolis historically identified as being Dhauli.
4. S Dhammika, *The Edicts of King Ashoka*.
5. Lions in Indian literature symbolize nobility and courage. The generic term for 'royal throne' is *simha-asana* (lion-seat). In art, the lion and the elephant always appear as arch-enemies.
6. *Vishnudharmottara Purana*; also Stella Kramrisch, 'Images of Shakti: Sardula, Lion and Lioness', *The Hindu Temple*, Volume II.
7. The presence of the conquering-lion motif at these temples is doubly significant, given that Shiva and the lion share the epithet Panchanana (Lord of the Five Elements).
8. KC Panigrahi, *History of Orissa*.

Glossary

Abhramatanga: cloud-elephant; another name for Airavatha
Abhramu: female guardian-elephant of the east; wife of Airavatha
Adinatha: first of the 24 Jain Tirthankaras
adisthana: base
Agasthya: mythical sage whose curse transforms a king into an elephant
Agni: Vedic divinity associated with fire
Airavatha: four-tusked white elephant belonging to Indra
Ajathashatru: 5th-century BCE Magadha ruler
Ajitanatha: second of the 24 Tirthankaras; his emblem is an elephant
akshauhini: ancient massed-army as described in the Vedas
Anantha: mythical multi-hooded serpent of Vishnu
Anantashayana: epithet of Vishnu resting on Ananta
Anjana: guardian-elephant of the west
Anjanavati: female guardian-elephant of the west
ankush: elephant-goad
Anupama: female guardian-elephant of the south-west
Aparanta: female guardian-elephant of the north
apsara: heavenly nymph
Arjuna: one of the Pandava brothers in the *Mahabharata*
arrack: country liquor
Arthashastra: 4th-century BCE manual of administration and jurisprudence
Aryan: nomadic people who invaded the northern plains of India around 2000 BCE
Ashoka: 3rd-century BCE Maurya Emperor
Ashtadikgajas: guardian-elephants of each of the eight directions
Ashwatthama: name of a legendary war elephant and of Dronacharya's son in the *Mahabharata*
asura: demon
Avalokiteshvara: also Padmapani; Bodhisattva associated with compassion and protection

badhra: noble
Baghiratha: mythical king who prayed for the river Ganga to descend on earth
Balarama: elder brother of Krishna
Bhima: one of the five Pandava brothers, known for his great physical strength
Bhudevi: a consort of Vishnu
bodhi: Indian peepul tree *(Ficus religiousa)*, associated with the Buddha's enlightenment
Bodhisattva: saviour or enlightened being destined to become a Buddha
Brahma: four-headed God of Creation
Brahmi: Indic script
Brihadishvara: another name of Shiva
Buddha: Enlightened One

chaitya: Buddhist chapel
chakra: discus
chamara: yak-tail flywhisk
Chandella: 9th–11th century dynasty of Central India
Chathurbhuja: 'Four-shouldered'; another name of Vishnu
Chaunsat Yogini: 64 attendant demi-goddesses of Parvati
Chedi: 2nd century BCE–1st century CE Orissan dynasty
Chhaddanta: six-tusked elephant hero of a *Jataka* story
Chola: 9th–12th-century South Indian dynasty
Cullasubbadha: vengeful queen-elephant in the *Chhaddanta Jataka*

Dadicha: mythical sage whose femurs are made into a weapon for Indra
daiva: fortune
Dashavatara: epithet of the ten incarnations of Vishnu: Matsya; Kurma; Varaha; Narasimha; Vamana; Parashurama; Rama; Krishna (or Balarama); Buddha and Kalki
deul: Orissan term for tower over the sanctuary of a temple
deva: god
Dhamma: Law of Piety; Buddhist doctrine
Dikgajas: caryatidal elephants of the four cardinal directions
Dirghatamas: mythical sage who curses the Ashtadikgajas
drona: unit of weight in the old Indian system of measures
Dronacharya: commander of the Kaurava Army in the *Mahabharata*
Durvasas: mythical sage who curses the gods with premature ageing
Dyayus: Vedic divinity of the sky; father of Indra and Agni

Early Chalukya: 6th–8th century Deccan dynasty
Eastern Ganga: 8th–14th century Orissan dynasty
Eka-dantha: one-tusked; another name of Ganesha

Gadarmal: shepherd-clan that lends its name to a Shiva temple in Central India
gaja: elephant
gaja-hastha: elephant hand-posture
gaja-kranthasimha: elephant-and-lion victory motif; also known as *gaja-simha* and *gaja-virala*
gaja-kurmasin: fabulous water-monster that feeds on elephants and tortoises
Gajalakshmi: Lakshmi with her attendant elephants
gaja-pitha: basement moulding of elephant figures
gaja-shastra: ancient science of elephant-care
Gajasura: elephant-demon destroyed by Shiva
Gajasura-samharamurti: Shiva as destroyer of Gajasura
gaja-thara: elephant-course
gaja-vyala: elephant-headed *vyala*
Gajendra Moksha: Salvation of Gajendra; popular legend from the *Vishnu Purana*
Gajendra: mythical elephant-hero of the *Gajendra Moksha*
gana: dwarf
Ganapati, Ganesha: elephant-headed son of Parvati and Shiva

Ganga: goddess of the River Ganga (Ganges)
Garuda: fabulous man-eagle vehicle of Vishnu
Gautama Siddhartha: birth-name of the Buddha
Ghateshvara: name of a particular Shiva linga enshrined in Badoli
Gupta: 3rd–6th-century Central Indian dynasty

Hada Chauhan: Rajput dynasty of Bundi and Kota
Haihaya: 8th–10th-century Central Indian dynasty
hathi: Hindi for elephant; from the Sanskrit *hastin*
hathi-pol: ceremonial palace gateway decorated with figures of elephants
Hathi-Shala: elephant court
Himapandura: guardian-elephant of the north
Hiranyakashipu: demon king destroyed by Vishnu in his incarnation as Narasimha
howdah: seat for riding on the back of an elephant or camel
Hoysala: 11th–14th-century South Indian dynasty

Indra Sabha: heavenly dwelling of Indra; eponymous temple at Ellora
Indra: Rig Vedic weather-god and king of gods; guardian of the east; master of Airavatha
Indradyumna: legendary king in the *Mahabharata*; owner of the war-elephant Ashwatthama. He is cursed to become the elephant Gajendra.
Indraiala: the 'net of illusions'
Indrani: consort of Indra

Jataka: birth-stories of the Buddha's successive incarnations
Jina: spiritual conqueror or Tirthankara; Jainism is named for the 24 Jinas

Kailasa: mountain range, abode of Shiva
Kailasanatha: Lord of Kailasa; another title of Shiva
Kalachuri: 5th–6th-century Western Indian dynasty
kalpavriksha: mythical tree-of-abundance
Kamsa: evil king killed by Krishna
Kandariya Mahadeva: another name for Shiva in Khajuraho
Kapila: guardian-elephant of the south-east
Karttikeya: warrior-son of Shiva and Parvati; his vehicle is a peacock
Kashivishveshvara: another name of Shiva
Kaurava: legendary clan of a hundred brothers in the *Mahabharata*; cousins of the Pandavas
Kautilya: 4th-century BCE minister at the court of Chandragupta Maurya
Keshava: Long-haired; another title of Krishna
keval-vriksha: wish-fulfilling tree in Jainism
kirthimukha: lion mask
koomeria: thoroughbred elephant
Krishna: eighth incarnation of Vishnu
Krishnadevaraya: 16th-century ruler of Vijayanagara
Kshatrapa: 2nd–4th-century Western Indian and Deccan dynasty
Kumuda: guardian-elephant of the south-west
Kurukshetra: legendary 18-day-long war in the *Mahabharata*
Kuvalayapida: name of Kamsa's rogue elephant

Lakshmana: younger brother of Rama in the *Ramayana*
Lakshmi: consort of Vishnu; goddess of beauty and prosperity
Lakshminarayana: another title of Vishnu
Late Chalukya: 10th–12th-century Deccan dynasty
Lingaraja: another name for Shiva in Bhubaneswar

Magadha: 6th–4th century BCE dynasty of Eastern India
Mahabharata: 'The Great Bharatas', the earlier and longer of the two great Hindu epics
Maha-hathipadoppama Sutra: Buddhist sacred text attributed to Sariputta
Mahanaleshvara: another name for Shiva in Menal
Mahamaya: mother of the Buddha
Mahanavami: ninth day of the Dasara Festival
Mahapadmasama: guardian-elephant of the south
Mahasubaddha: elephant-queen of Chhaddanta
Mahavira: Jain Tirthankara
Mahayana: Great Vehicle; the later school of Buddhism
Maheshvara: another name for Shiva
makhara: fantastic crocodile-like creature
Mallikarjuna: another title of Shiva
mantra: counsel
Maru Devi: mother of the first Jain Tirthankara, Adinatha
matanga: elephant
Matangalila: 'Elephant-Sport'; treatise on the Indian elephant-lore attributed to Nilakantha
Maurya: 4th–2nd-century BCE dynasty in Central, Western and Eastern India
meerga: deer-like elephant
Meghavan: another name of Indra
Mukteshvara: another name of Shiva

naga: serpent divinity associated with water and fertility; also another term for elephant
Nandi: bull mount of Shiva
Narasimha: part-human part-leonine incarnation of Vishnu who kills Hiranyakashipu
Narasimhadeva I: 13th-century Eastern Ganga king
nara-thara: basement frieze of human figures
Nataraja: Lord of Dance; another title of Shiva
natamandir: dance hall
Nayaka: 16th–18th-century rulers in parts of Southern India
Nilakantha: Blue-throated; another title of Shiva

Padmapani: Lotus-bearer; another name of Avalokiteshvara
padmasana: lotus-throne; a classic yoga posture
Palakapya: mythical sage and elephant doctor

Pallava: 6th–9th-century South Indian dynasty
Pali: ancient Buddhist script
Pancha Ratha: Five Chariots; monolithic shrines at Mammallapuram
Pandava: heroes of the *Mahabharatha*; they are the brothers Arjuna, Bhima, Yudhishtira, Nakula and Sahadeva
Pandya: 7th–13th-century South Indian dynasty
paranja: a short lance
Parashvanatha: second-last of the 24 Jain Tirthankaras
Parvati: consort of Shiva; mother of Ganesha and Karttikeya
Pingala: female guardian-elephant of the south
Prahalada: son of Hiranyakashipu, rescued from his wicked father by Narasimha
prabhu: sovereignty
Pratihara: 8th–11th-century dynasty in Western and Central India
Pritivi: Vedic earth-divinity and mother of Indra
Pundarika: guardian-elephant of the south-east
Puranas: sacred Hindu literature including parables, legends, ritual texts, spells and remedies
Pushpadantha: Flower-Tusk; guardian-elephant of the north-west

Rajput: 14th–20th-century Hindu warrior clans of Central and Western India
Rama: seventh incarnation of Vishnu and hero of the *Ramayana*; king of Ayodhya
Ramachandra: another name for Rama
Ramayana: Story of Rama, composed by the sage Valmiki; one of the two great Indian epics; principal characters include Rama and his wife Sita, his brother Lakshmana, the monkey-god Hanuman and the demon king Ravana.
Ranajira: one of the 64 Chaunsat Yoginis, emblemised by an elephant mount
Rashtrakuta: 7th–10th-century Deccan dynasty
Ravana: demon king of Lanka; abducts Sita and is slain by Rama in the *Ramayana*
Rig Veda: oldest and most important of the *Vedas*
Romapada: Lotus-Foot; a mythical king

Sal: *Shorea robusta* tree
Samadhishvara: Lord of Meditation; another title for Shiva in Chitorgarh
Sarangapani: another name of Vishnu
Sariputta: name of a main disciple of the Buddha
Sarvabhauma: guardian-elephant of the north
Satavahana: 2nd century BCE–3rd century CE dynasty in Central India and the Deccan
Saumanasa: guardian-elephant of the west
Shakti: female energy; branch of Hinduism revolving around the adoration of female deities
Shiva: principal deity in the Hindu pantheon of gods; consort of Parvati and father of Ganesha and Karttikeya. His symbol is the linga.
Shivalaya: abode of Shiva; eponymous temple in Badami
Shivprasad: Rao Ratan Singh's elephant, gifted by Shahjahan, with a memorial erected in Bundi in its honour
Shridevi: another name of Lakshmi, consort of Vishnu
Shubadanthi: Blessed-Tooth; female guardian-elephant of the north-west
Shunga: 2nd–1st-century BCE dynasty of Central and Eastern India
Simha-dwara: lion-gate; temple gate with lion carvings or sculptures
Sisodia: Rajput dynasty of Udaipur
Sita: wife of Rama
soma: intoxicating juice of a mythical plant cultivated in Indra's heaven
Somanatha: another name for Shiva
Somavashi: 9th–11th-century Central and Eastern India dynasty
Sonuttara: hunter in a *Jataka* tale
Suddhodana: ruler of Kapilavasthu; husband of Mahamaya and father of Gauthama Siddartha
Supratika: guardian-elephant of the north-east
Surya: the Sun God
Syavad: system of logic in Jainism emphasizing the multiplicity of perspectives

Tamrakarni: female guardian-elephant of the west
Tavashtra: name of a mythical blacksmith
Tomara: 8th–16th-century Rajput dynasty of Gwalior
torana: sandstone gateway

upapitha: sub-base, plinth
Urmila: wife of Lakshmana
utsaha: exuberance

vahana: vehicle or mount of a divinity
Vaishnava: pertaining to Vishnu
vajra: magical thunderbolt weapon of Indra
Vamana: guardian-elephant of the south
Vedas: earliest religious texts, composed as hymns to various divinities of the elements that later merged into Hinduism
Vigneshwara: remover of obstacles; another name of Ganesha
vihara: Buddhist/Jain monastery
Vijayanagara: 14th–17th-century Deccan and South Indian dynasty
Virupaksha: guardian-elephant of the east; also another name of Shiva
Vishnu: principal deity in the Hindu pantheon; appears in a series of ten incarnations, the Dashavatara
Vishvanatha: Lord of the Universe; another name for Shiva
Vritasura: Vedic demon of drought killed by Indra
vyala: fabulous hybrid animal

yakshi: female dryad associated with trees and fertility
Yudhishtira: Pandava brother in the *Mahabharata* known for his honesty

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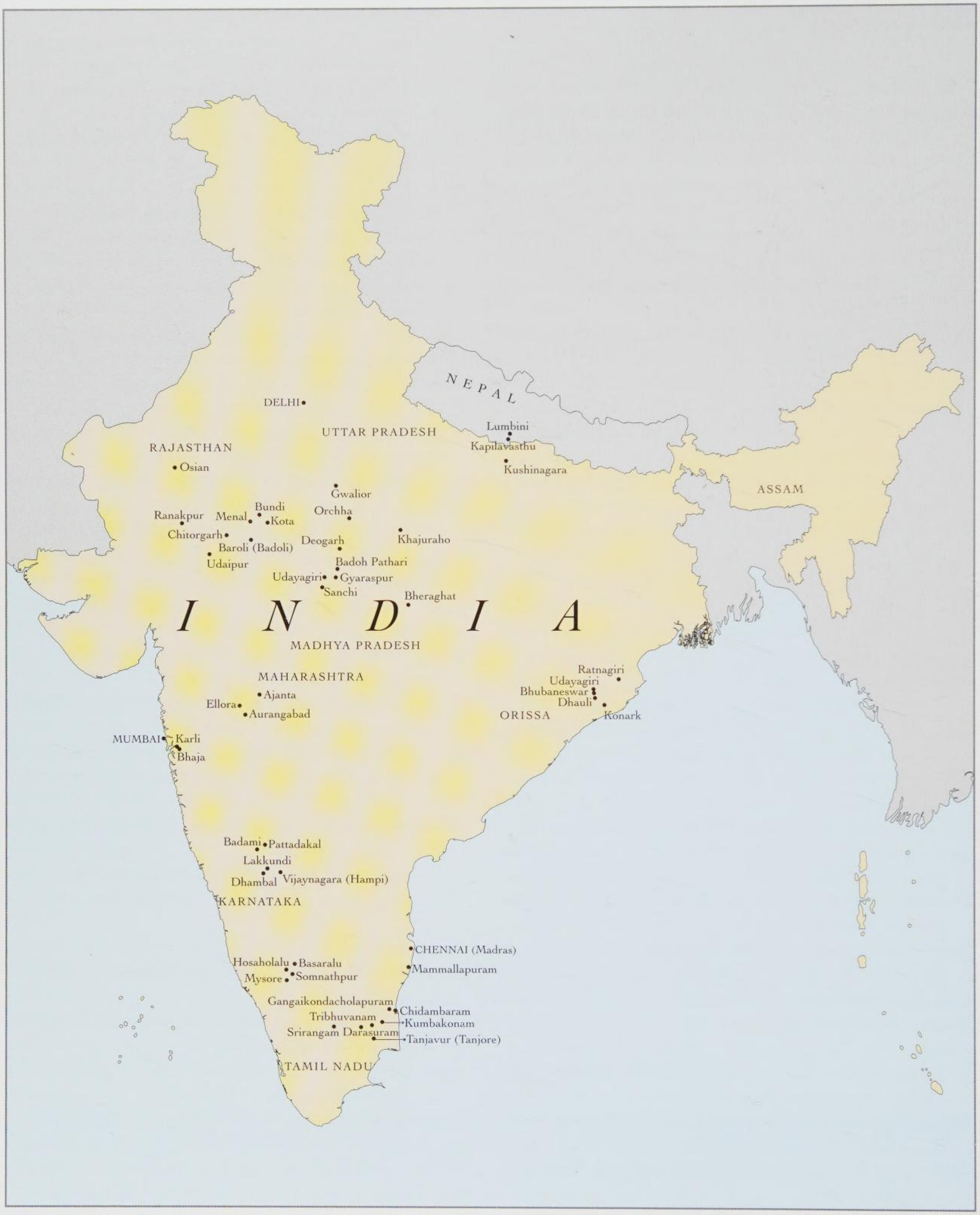

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Abbreviations

Karnataka	**K**
Madhya Pradesh	**MP**
Maharashtra	**M**
Orissa	**O**
Rajasthan	**R**
Tamil Nadu	**TN**
Uttar Pradesh	**UP**

Ajanta	M
Aurangabad	M
Badami	K
Badoh Pathari	MP
Badoli	R
Basaralu	K
Bhaja	M
Bheraghat	MP
Bhubaneswar	O
Bundi	R
Chidambaram	TN
Chitorgarh	R
Darasuram	TN
Deogarh	UP
Dhambal	K
Dhauli	O
Ellora	M
Gangaikondacholapuram	TN
Gwalior	MP
Gyaraspur	MP
Hosaholalu	K
Karli	M
Khajuraho	MP
Konark	O
Kota	R
Kumbakonam	TN
Kushinagara	UP
Lakkundi	K
Mammallapuram	TN
Menal	R
Orchha	MP
Osian	R
Pattadakal	K
Ranakpur	R
Ratnagiri	O
Sanchi	MP
Somnathpur	K
Srirangam	TN
Tanjavur	TN
Tribhuvanam	TN
Udaipur	R
Udayagiri	MP
Udayagiri	O
Vijayanagara	K

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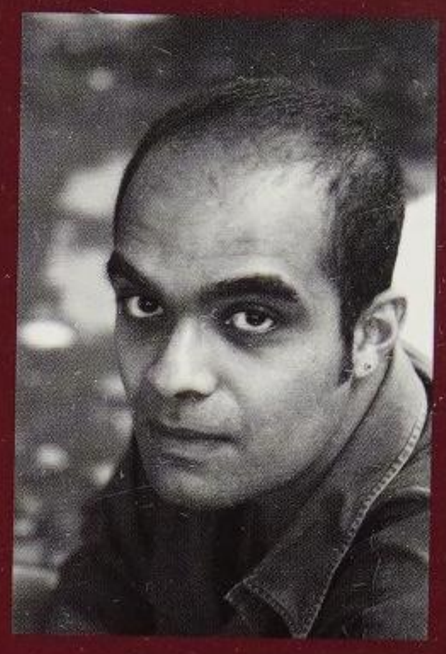

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